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Nomads' Land: Space and Narrative in the Work of Tierno Monénembo

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Abstract

This thesis explores the published work of Tierno Monénembo, Guinean author born in 1947. The main themes are space and narrative, and precisely how subjects creatively employ both. The thesis argues that Monénembo presents a reconfiguration of African subjecthood by centralising nomad subjects: characters who are wily *débrouillards*, ever on the move and ready to (re)invent both space and self. In a series of postcolonial rewritings, Monénembo reframes subjects beyond notions of race or victimhood. Their practices of invention are grounded in contexts rendered precarious and unstable by chains of violence and multiple losses, and the author represents these spaces in innovative language in several genres.

Mobility, or its absence, determines the themes, characterisation, and language in each of Monénembo's texts. It is addressed here via a number of contexts which position him within ongoing debates around historicisation, identity, and power in the postcolonial world. Chapter One looks at imperialism and the re-writing of history via *Le Roi de Kahel* and *Peuls*. In Chapter Two I explore dictatorship and the conflicting discourses which vie for space around it: the texts under examination are *Les Crapauds-brousse* and *Les Écailles du ciel*. In Chapter Three I discuss writing after genocide and other trauma. In comparing *L'Aîné des orphelins* to *Cinéma* and *La Tribu des gonzesses* I find common trends of performative storytelling which mark out Monénembo's protagonists as self-inventing survivors. The final main chapter groups together four exile texts to assess the effects of rupture and loss on language and space. Reading *Un Rêve utile*, *Un Attiéké pour Elgass*, *Pelourinho* and *Le Terroriste noir* reveals the creative agency at work in Monénembo's dislocated nomad subjects. A number of theoretical anchor points help to frame these studies and for these I draw on the work of Michel de Certeau, Achille Mbembe, and Patrice Nganang, among others. The thesis is concluded with a look at Monénembo in his own words as I draw together my predominant observations alongside his autobiographical comments.

List of abbreviations

<i>Les Crapauds-brousse</i> (Paris: Seuil, 1979)	<i>Crapauds</i>
<i>Les Écailles du ciel</i> (Paris: Seuil, 1986)	<i>Écailles</i>
<i>Un Rêve utile</i> (Paris: Seuil, 1991)	<i>Rêve</i>
<i>Un Attiéké pour Elgass</i> (Paris: Seuil, 1993)	<i>Attiéké</i>
<i>Pelourinho</i> (Paris: Seuil, 1995)	<i>Pelourinho</i>
<i>Cinéma</i> (1997)	<i>Cinéma</i>
<i>L'Aîné des orphelins</i> (Paris: Seuil, 2000)	<i>L'Aîné</i>
<i>Peuls</i> (Paris: Seuil, 2004)	<i>Peuls</i>
<i>La Tribu des gonzesses</i> (2006)	<i>Tribu</i>
<i>Le Roi de Kahel</i> (Paris: Seuil, 2008)	<i>Roi</i>
<i>Le Terroriste noir</i> (Paris: Seuil, 2012)	<i>Terroriste</i>
<i>Les Coqs cubains chantent à minuit</i> (Paris: Seuil, 2015)	<i>Coqs</i>

Introduction

Tierno Monénembo

Tierno Monénembo was born Thierno Saidou Diallo in Porédaka, in the region of Mamou, Guinea on July 21st 1947. He chose his pen name to honour his grandmother, who brought him up. Like many of his compatriots, he left his homeland to flee the dictatorial regime of Ahmed Sékou Touré, then president. Leaving on foot for Senegal in 1969 at the age of 22, Monénembo would only return to Guinea after Touré's death in 1984. Having studied in Ivory Coast, Monénembo moved to France in 1973 where he obtained a doctorate in biochemistry from the University of Lyon. He taught in Algeria and Morocco, and then in Caen, Normandy for many years, alongside his prolific writing career. Evidently shaped and enriched by experiences of exile and travel, Monénembo's vision of Guinea is clearly marked by distance and shifting perspectives. It will be interesting to see what form his next narratives take, given that he has recently returned to live in Guinea.

Just as Monénembo's own journeys can be traced in some of his characters', so the history of Guinea as a nation is visible as a gradual palimpsest in his work. Rather than addressing his texts in order of their publication, this thesis follows a broadly chronological progression based on the periods depicted in each book. This is so as to place Monénembo's transnational writing project within the context of the evolving world in which his characters walk. Though not a historical study, the thesis can in this way be helpfully read alongside chronological accounts of Guinea and the wider Francophone world.

Marked out early on as an astute critic of postcolonial society, Monénembo applies his conviction to change contemporary understandings of Africa to a large scale project of re-telling. Thus his two most historical novels seek to recapture stories of pre-colonial Guinea, and narrate them anew so as to challenge established accounts of history. In Chapter One *Peuls* traces the Peul kingdom between 1400 and 1800 and *Le Roi de Kahel* revisits the experiences of French explorer Oliver de Sanderval as he embarks in 1879 on the West African coast and endeavours to found his own kingdom in Fouta-Djalon.¹ Guinea gained independence from France in 1958 when a national referendum refused Charles de Gaulle's invitation into a new French Community. In Chapter Two bridging that colonial/post-colonial axis of time, *Les Écailles du ciel* follows an exile who is imprisoned in French-ruled Guinea, only to be 'freed' a decade into independence, thus moving Monénembo's fiction on to the harsh darkness of Touré's Guinea. *Les Crapauds-brousse* is a caustic indictment of post-independence corruption which gives a bitter flavour of the horrors of Touré's presidency, which lasted from 1958 to 1984. Chapter Three examines three texts. *Cinéma* depicts an independent Guinea still plagued by the tensions of unhealthy autocratic politics and its consequent urban instability. *L'Aîné des orphelins*, and *La Tribu des gonzesses* are set in the 1990s, outside of Guinea, and interrogate questions of international responsibility across the Francophone diaspora. In the final novels addressed in this thesis Monénembo depicts exile in various forms, and this forms the basis of Chapter Four. Modern day Salvador da Bahia in *Pelourinho*, and a village in the Vosges in *Le Terroriste noir* are settings for posthumous rememberings of wandering figures; and *Un Rêve utile* and *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* follow exiled Guineans as they negotiate life in chaotic cities. *Les Coqs cubains chantent minuit* was unfortunately published too late to feature thoroughly in this thesis. It is mentioned in the

¹ Peul is the Pulaar and French word used to describe the Fulani ethnic group, found all across West Africa. Monénembo himself is of Peul origin.

conclusion, where the main threads of the thesis are drawn together within a reading of Monénembo's own biography.

Similar pictures are painted in novels by other Guinean authors like Williams Sassine, whose *Le Zéhéros n'est pas n'importe qui* depicts the political and social deterioration of Guinea after independence. Alioum Fantouré is equally acerbic in his fictional vision of Touré's Guinea in 1972, when he writes *Le Cercle des tropiques*. As with their compatriot precursor Camara Laye, these novelists weave dark reality between the lines of their fictional trajectories, always capturing the instability of Guinea under Touré. Monénembo's uniqueness comes in his representation of unstable space across a vast historical span, and in his expression of nomadic thought in characters who respond to such instability. That said, as an exile and critic of Guinea, his writing resonates with these inter-texts, just as his more recent public declarations echo the critiques which lace his fiction.

But none of these authors limits their writing subjects to their home country, and having seen a glimpse of Monénembo's international meanderings (both autobiographical and fictional), it makes sense to place him in a wider literary cohort. Novels by Algerian Assia Djebar and Ivoirian Véronique Tadjo elucidate Monénembo's writing through comparative study. Novelists Henri Lopès and Sony Labou Tansi from the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose stylistic influence is notable particularly in the creation of certain atmospheres within the texts, also shed light. Beyond francophone Africa, fascinating connections are drawn with other African texts: novels by anglophone authors including Ben Okri and Nuruddin Farah. Parallels will be drawn with these authors' works of fiction throughout the thesis, to establish a background cartography of African literature, with Monénembo as its principle authorial voyager.

Though he has been recognised and celebrated for a number of works – namely winning the Grand prix littéraire d’Afrique noir for *Les Écailles du ciel* in 1986, the Prix Renaudot for *Le Roi de Kahel* in 2008 and the Grand Prix du Roman Métis for his latest novel *Le Terroriste noir* (2012) – Monénembo has received relatively little attention in Europe. Reading him in the context of a manifesto on African literature in this thesis will indicate that, though transnational in scope, Monénembo’s focus is largely on the experience of African subjects around the world. Vocal in matters of francophone politics, and featured in a number of published interviews, he is not absent from media attention. However, he has had little coverage in Britain, and in the world of criticism to date he has not been adequately explored in studies which relate him to other authors and consider his work as a whole.

Although a number of works exist which highlight certain aspects of Monénembo’s literature, none to date offer a comprehensive study of his whole work which dialogues with the key issues debated in Francophone postcolonial studies. Monénembo’s writing contributes to discussions of historiography, dictatorship, memory, oral cultures, and migration, and the existing literature falls short of giving a full picture of this scope. Noémie Auzas pays careful attention to the dialectics of trauma and memory in her study, *Tierno Monénembo: une écriture de l’instable*.² Her contribution to critical literature on Monénembo is invaluable, highlighting the theme of instability as a thread in his texts. According to Auzas, the author’s writing embodies the detours and vicissitudes which characterise African life both on a daily basis, and in the macrocosmic patterns of history: ‘se tisse alors le lien entre les aléas du destin collectif, l’instabilité de la grande Histoire, et le chaos de la vie des personnages, l’instabilité de la petite histoire’.³ This is an appropriate starting point for an analysis of space in Monénembo’s

² Noémie Auzas, *Tierno Monénembo: une écriture de l’instable* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004).

³ Ibid., p. 31.

work, but Auzas' commentaries fail to address the power contest at work in the spaces depicted by the author. Her study only mainly draws on four of his texts which, though providing interesting points of comparison, leave evident gaps as regards Monénembo's political engagement in particular. In this thesis, I examine Monénembo's whole œuvre, which is explored alongside the interactions between history and text. I investigate not only the vicissitudes of West African history, but how the precarious everyday contexts described by Monénembo infiltrate his writing style and choices of genre and structure. Beyond this, I demonstrate how series of (transnational) movements condition and emerge from a collective nomadic mindset. This is shared by Monénembo's protagonists, and is manifest in their physical mobility as well as in their language and their political engagement. On the whole, the author uses this common nomadic thinking to reconfigure postcolonial subjects beyond the bounds of nation, victimhood, and race. In this way it is central to his postcolonial project, and where Auzas effectively assesses the theme of instability, my thesis foregrounds how Monénembo maximises that instability to reconfigure the African subject.

The 2012 study by Elisa Diallo, *Tierno Monénembo: une écriture migrante* does a very good job of analysing the migratory character of his writing, which is at once tied to traditions of oral story-telling and to the international movements of the contemporary world.⁴ Her systematic reading of *Un Rêve utile* is particularly helpful in its unpicking of Monénembo's language. Only a small section is given to the specific experiences of nomad subjects, and their imaginaries and political practices do not feature, in a text which is otherwise compelling despite only dealing with four of Monénembo's texts. Issues of subjecthood and its ambiguities are not explored in depth. Similar limitations are to be found in two theses by Edem Awumey (2006) and Adama Coulibaly (2010), which highlight specific

⁴ Elisa Diallo, *Tierno Monénembo: une écriture migrante* (Paris: Karthala, 2012).

issues by examining the experience of exile and the author's linguistic techniques, respectively.⁵ All of these are significant, and find their place here knitted into a more rigorous and engaging study of Monénembo's work. The present study places high importance on that relationship between mobility and identity, and comes to it via a theoretical framework which draws predominantly on French and Cameroonian thinkers.

The last two years have seen a number of welcome publications on Monénembo. Mohamed Keïta's *Tierno Monénembo: une approche psychocritique de l'oeuvre romanesque* excellently analyses the symbolism of various recurring motifs such as alcohol, childhood, and prison.⁶ These elucidate how Monénembo's literary creation is determined by his own biography, and explore more generally the relationship between psychology and writing. An issue of *Interculturel Francophonies* published in 2006 incited interest across a number of themes, including autobiography (which features in the conclusion to this thesis) but none of its articles have the scope to address all of Monénembo's publications as I do here. The comparison drawn between Said and Monénembo by Boniface Mongo-Mboussa in that volume is one I explore in a discussion of exile in Chapter Four.⁷ Bernard de Meyer and Papa Samba Diop collected another insightful set of articles in a 2014 issue of *Littératures et cultures francophones hors d'Europe* dedicated to Monénembo's writing.⁸ The range of themes addressed (exile, orality, genre) highlight how widely the author's corpus appeals. There are also examples of

⁵ Edem Awumey, 'Écrire le retour: Pelourinho et la part du mythe', in *Écritures et Mythes: L'Afrique en questions*, ed. by Sélom Gbanou and Sénamin Amedegnato (Bayreuth, Germany: Bayreuth University, 2006), pp. 319-331; Adama Coulibaly, *Des techniques aux stratégies d'écriture dans l'œuvre romanesque de Tierno Monénembo* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

⁶ Mohamed Keïta, *Tierno Monénembo: une approche psychocritique de l'œuvre romanesque* (Paris: Harmattan, 2014).

⁷ Jacques Chevrier, ed. 'Tierno Monénembo', *Interculturel Francophonies*, 9 (2006).

⁸ Bernard De Meyer, and Papa Samba Diop, eds. 'Tierno Monénembo et le roman: Histoire, exil, écriture', *Littératures et cultures francophones hors d'Europe* 8 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014).

astute textual analysis which show how Monénembo's linguistic choices explore these themes. These inform various sections of the thesis which follows.

Significant critical attention has been given to the 2000 novel *L'Aîné des orphelins*, largely because of its place in the wider project 'Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire'. Scholarship by Bernard de Meyer, Audrey Small and Michael Syrotinski contribute to discussion of this novel, which will be elaborated in Chapter Three. This thesis provides an original contribution to readings of Monénembo's text by incorporating many of the elements listed above, in an English-language text which is at once comprehensive in its objects of analysis, and wide-reaching in its dialogic engagement with the wider themes of contemporary postcolonial studies. Where studies of this Rwanda project have been dominated by discussions of political responsibility and the details of the genocide itself, Monénembo places emphasis on survivor figures, blurring the boundaries between guilt and innocence and suggesting that a focus on the seemingly banal everyday might be a more authentic vehicle for remembrance. Thus far, insufficient attention has been given to subjects' interaction with space. This thesis explores recurring patterns in responses to the instability of space, across diverse historical and political contexts. The aim is to show how Monénembo recasts postcolonial subjects by emphasising a common nomadic mindset that is wily and creative instead of identifying them according to victimhood or ethnicity. I turn now to a theoretical prelude which summarises the scholarly discussion around nomads in literature.

Reading nomads

Each of Monénembo's novels features a protagonist living out a story of displacement. Such a pattern seems to articulate the experience of the postcolonial subject. Whether opted for or completely imposed, departure and journey

characterise these biographies. Monénembo is to be found in his fiction, indeed, he cites, ‘tout roman, si ‘objectif’ soit-il en apparence, est le portrait de son auteur, et n’obéit qu’aux lois de l’univers intérieur de l’écrivain’ (*Peuls*, 9). The author’s own life story has been one of migrating and relocating, and the influence of his autobiographical trajectories on fictional ones will be highlighted throughout the thesis, and particularly in the conclusion. Because of the prominence of this experience, and because Monénembo creates a literary landscape covered in complex routes, nomadic experience is of vital importance to any reading of his work. In this thesis, I pay special attention to how a creative nomadic mindset determines the practices of Monénembo’s characters, and how in turn an awareness of nomadic subjectivity can lead to a reconfiguration of belonging and spatialisation.

Broadly speaking, nomad subjects in this thesis are those whose ways of being are defined by mobility. Although arguably in some cases the journeys are made out of choice (Escritore in *Pelourinho* goes to Brazil in search of ancestral history; Idjatou in *Attiéké* chooses to leave for Brussels), there are always political and economic factors out of the characters’ control which trigger their departures. My use of the label nomad does not only apply to ethnic nomads, such as the *Peuls* who are the subjects of Monénembo’s eponymous historical novel and Chapter One here. It applies also to political exiles, abandoned orphans, international recruits and others, who are drawn out of their homeland and into (sometimes repeated and prolonged) journeys of wandering and reterritorialising. A nuanced articulation of nomadic experience is vital, and I readily stress here that the subjects in question are neither metaphorical nor jet-set. As Rosi Braidotti and Edward Said both underline, homeless people, migrants, exiles, refugees and illegal immigrants, *inter alia*, are not to be thought of as symbolic wanderers; in fact they live an often violent and perilous existence within highly specific

geopolitical and historic locations.⁹ It is these characters who shape and mould Monénembo's nomads' land, and they must be considered as subjects grounded in particular situations. Where nomadic thought has been criticised for its lack of application, Monénembo illustrates it outworked in conditions based often on lamentable real life situations. For this reason, historical context and attention to specific circumstances are major preoccupations here; I do not want to fall into the trap of poetic recourse to nomads as symbols.

Nomadic thought, as described by Braidotti, goes hand in hand with the aims of postcolonial studies which are transnational rather than Eurocentric in approach, since it necessarily considers the heterogeneity of nomadic experience. Rather than taking nomads as either symbolic figures or those who wander in the margins unseen, nomadic thought engenders a larger scale revisioning, since 'it amounts to a politically invested cartography of the present condition of mobility in a globalized world'.¹⁰ It is this kind of revised cartography which Michel de Certeau appeals for; I turn to him shortly.

Braidotti emphasises that the subjects in question do not necessarily partake in literal acts of travelling. Rather, the nomadic state is defined by 'the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour'.¹¹ Whereas this thesis seeks to reveal common tendencies in a nomadic social imaginary, and therefore does argue for some kind of coded thought and behaviour, Braidotti's emphasis on mind over physicality in travelling is helpful indeed, and encapsulates our search for a collective imaginary. Not all of Monénembo's subjects are physically on the move: some are nomadic in language

⁹ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 174; Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 10.

¹⁰ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

or thought alone. In his bid to recast the postcolonial African subject, Monénembo uses each of these forms of movement to challenge notions of subject which are equated with immobile categories of nation, race, or victim.

Nomads have been variously treated in theory, but the danger has been to fall on either side of an anthropology-philosophy barrier. Consequently, nomadism has either been studied as the literal travels of an ethnic group, or conversely as a purely theoretical model in the vein of Deleuze and Guattari. As John Noyes surmises in his 2010 article 'Nomadism, nomadology, postcolonialism', there has not always been adequate interrogation of the relations between actual nomadic practices and the representational models which stem from them.¹² Noyes appeals for an interrogation of the move from nomadism as a lifestyle to nomadology as a critical tool.

This thesis proposes to take its corpus as an exemplary cartography where not only such a move is evidenced, but where a nomadic imaginary, which shapes practice, is played out. The postcolonial novel is a complex and fascinating field for this sought after in-between ground, since there we see plenty of shifts in favour of a focus on the margins rather than the centre, as well as a wealth of characters performing everyday practices. Monénembo's work provides a pertinent case study, since not only does it predominantly consist of novels, but the author's very experience and focus is on nomadic living and practices. Thus there is a double nomadic thread, both inter-textually and meta-textually, through and over the fictional cartography he scribes. The theoretical writing of Braidotti has been targeted for over-romanticising the experience of nomad subjects as privileged travel free from pain and constraint.¹³ But Monénembo avoids such romanticism

¹² John Noyes, 'Nomadism, Nomadology, Postcolonialism: By Way of Introduction', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 6:2 (2004), 159-168 (p. 165).

¹³ Dick Pels, 'Privileged Nomads: On the Strangeness of Intellectuals and the Intellectuality of Strangers', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16:1 (1999), 63-86.

by repeatedly depicting the hardship of postcolonial realities in his texts. Where he undoubtedly celebrates nomadic thought, this does not come at the expense of a firm indictment of the contexts he describes.

Framing space

A theorist whose ideas and methodology seem to answer Noyes' appeal for a comprehensive middle ground between pure theory and historical anthropology is Michel de Certeau. Critic and cultural policy advisor in France, born in 1925 but predominantly in the public eye from 1968, Certeau has seen significant impact from his extensive work, where his interests range from immigration and asylum to urban development and architecture. In this thesis, Certeau's methodology for approaching objects of analysis hitherto restricted by interpretative essentialism will act as a guide for exploring nomadic movements and mindsets in the literary oeuvre of Monénembo.

Certeau worked for a long time on studies of Jesuits Pierre Favre (on whose spiritual diary he wrote his doctoral thesis) and Jean-Joseph Surin, but following the events of May 1968 in Paris his work saw a change in focus. He would be called upon time and again to lecture and be interviewed in public, and would publish with great energy and creativity for fifteen years. He taught and wrote about subjects as wide ranging as theology, history, linguistic policy and psychoanalysis. The main texts of interest to us in this thesis will be his 1974 *L'Invention du Quotidien* (translated by Steven Rendall in 1984 as *The Practice of Everyday Life*), and *La Culture au pluriel* (translated by Tom Conley in 1997 as *Culture in the Plural*). We will also have course to refer to his *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other* (translated posthumously to English by Brian Massumi in 1986), *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (trans. Tom Conley, *The Writing of History*, 1988) and *La Fable mystique* (trans. Michael Smith, *The Mystic Fable*, 1992).

Where Certeau's writing has been well exploited in the arenas of the social sciences, it remains little applied in studies of fictional texts, despite its exploration of the evolution of 'scriptural economies'. I appeal here in particular to his methodological approach, described by Ben Highmore as 'a metamethodology which is dedicated to encouraging heterogeneity and allowing alterity to proliferate'.¹⁴ Diversity is a central concern for Certeau, who advocates an approach to culture which promotes and incorporates difference in a welcoming space. As Highmore explains:

for de Certeau 'diversity' is the fundamental operation of alteration in the face of those that are other than you: it is the welcome that refuses to preach 'acculturation' or 'assimilation' – it is the hospitality that will alter its laws in its dynamic changing culture where immigration is not something to be 'dealt with' but is the life-blood of culture itself.¹⁵

In this, mobility is always prioritised, and this in connection with a number of pertinent themes. Focalisation, everyday practice, people's relation to space, and *débrouillardise* each recur with striking frequency in Certeau's writing, and will be addressed at this point with a view to signalling his relevance to Monénembo. Dovetailing Certeau's ideas in a framework with the ideas of Patrice Nganang and Achille Mbembe emphasises their relevance for contemporary African contexts. Hence the principal vectors of Certeau's writing will be applied within the contours of these thinkers' arguments. Without wishing to wander too far from the novels studied in the coming pages, what follows is an outline of the above themes with a view to providing not merely a riveting *détour*, but a framework for following Monénembo's narrative trajectories through this thesis.

¹⁴ Ward, Graham, ed. *The Certeau Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 155.

¹⁵ Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 8; 22.

Broadly speaking, Certeau is concerned with rethinking an approach to cultural studies. His criticism of analysis in the social sciences comes down to its strategic essentialism, reductions to homogeneity which are insisted upon by elites who exclude difference.¹⁶ For this reason, it is most appropriate for application in postcolonial studies, and in particular for Monénembo's project of re-casting African subjects beyond essentialist or disempowering representations. As Ahearne surveys, Certeau's writing acts more as an example of methodology than a formal model to be applied. '[His] interpretative tools...cannot be automatically applied to any situation, but can enable us to discern more clearly the overlooked implications of practices disseminated throughout the social body.'¹⁷ He unravels this approach across many texts, indeed with many objects of analysis in mind. The descriptive terms which are most prominent in his account of everyday practices carry connotations of roughly four features: they are hidden, heterogeneous, devious, and stubborn.¹⁸ These characteristics are mirrored in Monénembo's texts, where the same kinds of behaviours are depicted in guileful, surreptitious practices. Certeau helpfully elucidates Monénembo in the importance he gives to stories. He describes stories as ubiquitous, 'organiz[ing] in advance our work, our celebrations, and even our dreams', but vitally as vehicles for empowered storytelling agents to shape space.¹⁹ In this thesis I will demonstrate repeatedly how an essential part of nomadic *débrouillardise* comes in the use of narrative as 'a practical resource for performances and actions: it supplies a repertoire for different responses to different situations'.²⁰ It is the recourse to this repertoire that Monénembo both meta-textually enacts, and intra-textually depicts. Tracing how African subjects, Peuls, and nomads, have been invented over time, Monénembo's

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁷ Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau: Interpretation and its Other* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), p. 172.

¹⁸ Highmore, p. 108.

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: California University Press, 1984), p. 186.

²⁰ Highmore, p. 127.

re-writings respond to form a more complex and comprehensive representation, within which he has fictional characters do the same kinds of space-shaping through stories. Through them we read many ‘colliding texts’,²¹ following their trajectories of everyday practice largely through circumstances of which they are not seen to be masters. Certeau’s study of discourses highlights the agency and social roles which are enacted by different subjects, and in this thesis nomadic thought clarifies both. Firstly we turn our attention to perspective, and to what Certeau suggests on the subject.

I begin with focalisation, not only because it is logical to start any critical analysis by establishing one’s point(s) of view, but also because it is a determining factor for Certeau and one of the ways Monénembo’s mobile narratives define themselves as unique. Gérard Genette espouses the term focalisation with this description: ‘une restriction de “champ”, c’est-à-dire en fait une sélection de l’information narrative par rapport à ce que la tradition nommait l’*omniscience*’.²² By categorising zero, internal, and external narrative perspectives as conditioned by ‘more or less distance’, he assumes mobility from the outset, since moving between ‘more or less’ requires some dynamic change. There is mobility at the heart of shifts of perspective, and this is essential for Monénembo’s nomad narrators. For Certeau, an essentialist perspective on culture results in deceptively homogenised representation. This comes in the form of images, texts and other accounts which constitute and perpetuate what he terms a ‘fiction du savoir’, whereby objects of analysis are straightforward and comprehensible (*lisible*) for those observing them.²³ What Certeau calls for, conversely, is an attentive perspective which travels to see different things in magnified detail. The example he chooses to illustrate this opposition is of an all-seeing eye atop the World Trade

²¹ Ahearne, p. 168.

²² Gérard Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 49.

²³ ‘N’être que ce point voyant, c’est la fiction du savoir.’ Michel De Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien: 1. arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 140.

Center (as was) in New York City. Rather than being clasped by the streets below – themselves working to move the city’s inhabitants in an unreadable and labyrinthine process – to be elevated to the summit of the World Trade Center allows for freedom and a sense of power. Such a position allows one to be set apart as a distant voyeur, ‘to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god’.²⁴ The complex reality of the city at street level is somehow forgotten, and it is fixed in the viewer’s eye as something conclusive, immobile, and readable. But for Certeau this is a dangerously limited perspective and establishes a false concept of the city, blind to the system of practices at work below. Instead, the critic encourages another path: one which follows the steps of a city’s *Wandersmänner*: ordinary practitioners of the city who live ‘below the thresholds at which visibility begins’.²⁵

In *On the Postcolony*, Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe criticises discourses of Africa for being too distant from reality in their representations.²⁶ In his 2010 essay *Sortir de la grande nuit* he redresses this imbalance by exploring the very material conditions which characterise decolonisation on that continent.²⁷ But rather than reiterate the negative implications of these processes, he sees them as points of departure, catalysts for creative reinventions and definitions of what Africa means today. In line with his writing elsewhere, he underlines the place of complexity and mobility in shaping African subjecthood. Both of these, as I will determine, are to be found in the work of Monénembo.

Cameroonian novelist and philosopher Patrice Nganang is of central importance to this study. His *Manifeste d’une nouvelle littérature africaine* sets out parameters for what he believes sets contemporary African literature apart from other

²⁴ Certeau, *Practice* p. 92.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

²⁶ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 5.

²⁷ Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l’Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: Découverte, 2010).

writing.²⁸ Where Mbembe assesses a diaspora of African subjects, Nganang draws attention to a number of specific contexts: writing after genocide, writing in the decay of cities, writing in dictatorship. It will become obvious how each of these is relevant to reading Monénembo. The anchor point from Nganang's text which proves most useful is 'la rue' (his primary reference for authentic experience of contemporary urban Africa) where survivors move through 'un espace infini de possibilités qui naissent du désordre'.²⁹ This setting highlights the precarity and the promise held in such space: 'dans son humaine, trop humaine inscription sur le cyclique chemin de la vie...la critique sociale...son incomparable incertitude...dans le définitivement indéfini de son futur'.³⁰ For Monénembo equally, this is the defining space of African subjecthood. It is while located in such spaces (characterised largely by uncertainty, detritus, and violence) that Monénembo's characters enact physical and narrative practices to reconfigure both self and space. For Monénembo it is less about a city per se, and more about the sense of space conveyed via 'du bricolage, de la débrouille, de la récréation de la parole' so evident in his fiction.³¹ It is from streets saturated in 'l'humidité, la misère, la saleté, le bruit' that this *débrouillardise* emerges: the author concludes, 'Je pense que c'est là que le nouvel homme africain est en train de se faire'.³² It is precisely these forms of becoming, self-writing and inventiveness which will be under examination in this thesis. I will show that Monénembo always 'grounds' these wily ways in rough, unstable locations.

Monénembo's fiction answers Certeau's appeal for down to earth analysis, and simultaneously meets the demands made by Braidotti and Said in grounding narrative in undeniably materialist conditions. Nganang's focus on 'la rue' does the

²⁸ *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine* (Paris: Homnisphères, 2007).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

³¹ Éloïse Brezault, *Afrique: paroles d'écrivains* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encrier, 2012), p. 269.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

same. This walking at street level has two major implications: first, the narrative perspectives are always mobile; and secondly, they unveil details which have otherwise remained unseen. Monénembo's stories and characters are carried along varying routes: travelling, roaming, and migrating. A marked tendency in his writing is the authorial decision to follow a single character-narrator throughout the story, enabling the discovery of a wider story, group or place to be revealed through one set of wandering eyes. The important difference from the all-seeing voyeur criticised by Certeau is that these character narrators make no claims to omniscience, and do not remain in the same place. Indeed, the 'other path' called for by Certeau unwinds endlessly in multiple directions, and is rerouted by social and political circumstances. In this thesis Certeau's concerns are a backdrop for examining Monénembo's depictions of subjects in space. So as Samba is forced out of his village in *Les Êê du ciel*, no narrative continues in the village once he has left: our only reintroduction is when Samba himself returns. Similarly, when Escritore travels to Brazil in *Pelourinho*, no narrative progresses in his West African home. The narrative trajectory is the same of the protagonist narrator, and as she or he walks on, more comes into view. In Chapter Three of the thesis, Nganang's foundational setting of 'la rue', the chaotic urban centres of contemporary Africa, is the area of focus for such trajectories. Monénembo's depictions of violence and ruin are a long way from representations of spaces which are easy to inhabit or negotiate. They do not constitute – as will be seen from Chapter One onwards – an attempt at inventing a problem-free Africa nor any sense of pre-colonial purity. Instead, the spaces he creates and critiques are host to the persistent problems and uncertainties that plague postcolonial space. Indeed, a continual walk at such a street level moves further away from the essentialism criticised by Certeau in that as the narrator keeps moving, she or he takes in an accumulation of views from fixed points, and, further, at street level there are countless underground or hidden sites from which an elevated and distant voyeur

would be free. Monénembo's narrative perspectives thus place directly before his readers not only the ugly realities of contemporary Africa, but its complexities too. At the heart of this comes the *débrouillard* thought that characterises each protagonist's behaviour. It is a focus on subjects' interaction with space, their practices of owning and conditioning that space, and how they negotiate power dynamics amidst contexts which are often violent and always unstable, which sets Monénembo apart. His nomad subjects traverse, contest, and transcend borders as they hide from and respond to more dominant forces, and continually innovate. These attributes, collectively posited in this thesis as nomadic thought played out in *débrouillardise*, are the parameters Monénembo relies on for reframing the African subject. His survivor and storyteller figures refuse categorisation as victims and instead are presented as energetic agents always producing space through language and interactions with others.

Reading inter-textually amid Monénembo's corpus, we follow the paths of a host of *Wandersmänner*, each following different routes and rhythms. Evidently, this does not mean that the characters are never stationary. As Deleuze and Guattari have remarked, 'a pure nomad does not exist'.³³ Indeed, Monénembo's characters settle and establish homes, like Faustin variously in the orphanage and the HQ in *L'Aîné des orphelins*. In line with Braidotti, it is their consciousness which is most persistently nomadic, not their actual daily movements.

What such mobility does imply is the proximity and detail allowed for by roaming narratives. Rather than maintaining distance as an alien voyeur, these characters observe the finest details, moving amongst places usually left hidden, and are thus well-placed to describe them. Binguel in *Cinéma* reveals hideouts only frequented by street kids, just as Olivier de Sanderval uncovers the inner courts of Fouta

³³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 148.

chiefs in *Le Roi de Kahel*. Importantly, these characters find themselves (by choice or force) at some distance from what or whom they observe. Certeau writes about a ‘remainder’ which is left in any assimilation imposed by an elite,³⁴ and we might see these nomadic characters as located and relocated in the space of that remainder. In Chapter Four I explore Monénembo’s textual representation of various kinds of exile spaces. What follows is the perspective of an outsider, an underdog whose own creative movement subsequently draws closer to that which is observed. It becomes impossible to claim omniscience when faced with the tiny details of the everyday, just as it is impossible to feign complete elucidated knowledge when walking and watching in darkness and shadows. Subjects who watch from the wings are excellently placed to decipher the overt and covert practices of domination being played out on the stage of postcolonial power relations. Equally, they are ready to form their own practices to counter such domination. This kind of spatial interaction, and the discourses which constitute it, is examined in Chapter Two.

Certeau highlights the danger of objectifying social practices, and calls instead for representations which manifest the heterogeneous operations really at work in any given space. These operations are everyday practices to which a perspective is only exposed when it wanders and draws in close.

The practical logic called for by Certeau is manifest in Monénembo’s use of the ordinary. Where the former seeks ‘a truth about operating, without theory’, the novelist writes everyday stories which show character agents living through a range of circumstances. What renders them ordinary, or everyday, is the focus Monénembo’s novels give. For example, in his contribution to the Fest’Africa project *Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire*, rather than directly narrating the

³⁴ Michel De Certeau, *Une Politique de la langue. La Révolution française et les patois: l’enquête de Grégoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 167.

horrifying events of the genocide in 1994, the author tells the story of one affected orphan boy. And even in the grand epic *Peuls*, Monénembo's account focuses on family stories strewn with everyday details of disputes, rather than telling one big story. His fictionalised re-tellings of famous stories, which come primarily in the form of novels, prioritise ordinary actions and people, and render his oeuvre an everyday historiography grounded in real life. This groundedness is vital for examining Monénembo's writing as nomad thought applied. I will show in each chapter what role storytelling has to play in this: like how a group of friends in Paris (*La Tribu des gonzesses*) and a gang of youths in Lyon (*Un Rêve utile*) tell stories of immigration from the banlieues. Exile, for example in Badio's case, is narrated according to autobiographical experience, rather than being used as a mere symbol or reductive *topos*.

Unlike the strategic essentialism criticised in the social sciences, novels provide the ideal context for an exploration of such everyday stories. Details elsewhere thought to be trivial are centralised and celebrated. 'They find there a new representational space, that of fiction, populated by everyday virtuosités that science doesn't know what to do with and which become the signatures, easily recognized by readers, of everyone's micro-stories.'³⁵ And so Monénembo's novels, collectively, form a vast space for practices to be played out and observed: his rewriting projects re-view the genocide in Rwanda, immigration, and exile, but also imperialism, nationalist dictatorship, slavery and other big stories from the perspective of everyday subjects, following their steps at ground level, in narrative vicissitudes I will trace in the coming chapters.

In considering Monénembo's whole oeuvre as a textual space, we come to another of Certeau's major preoccupations. His writing on people's interaction with space dominates *The Practice of Everyday Life* but also infiltrates his *The Writing of*

³⁵ Certeau, *Practice*, p. 70.

History and La culture au pluriel. Finding pictorial and cartographic representations of people's trajectories generally inadequate, Certeau continues to underline the danger of misleadingly homogeneous representations. 'Certeau does not dispute the heuristic validity of such procedures, but challenges rather any implicit assumption that they master reality.'³⁶ Rather than series of linear marks from apparently simple points A to B, he argues for series of other complex representations, which are necessarily scriptural since these journeys occur within, and themselves form, what he terms spatial syntaxes. 'L'espace,' he writes, 'est un lieu pratiqué', where character-agents condition space through their ways of being.³⁷ Spanning seven centuries and three continents, Monénembo's work incorporates such temporal and geographical breadth that in itself it acts as a vast *lieu pratiqué*. Here stories traverse and are intertwined on a vast textual space, and inscribe a whole range of the dynamics of people in places. For Mbembe, mobility is what conditions the development of postcolonial Africa. But the lines traced on the cartography he sketches are neither predictable nor based on standing categories of nations or races. Conversely, they are

lignes frénétiques, à la vérité, qui se brisent sans cesse, changent continuellement de direction, ouvrant la voie à un mouvement tourbillonnaire – l'accident plutôt que l'événement, les spasmes, l'étirement par le bas, le mouvement sur place et, dans tous les cas, la complication et l'équivocité.³⁸

These global movements of people between and within various spaces engender social transformations and new ways of being. The effects on narrative and memory of what Mbembe describes as 'un nouvel âge de dispersion et de

³⁶ Ahearne, p. 177.

³⁷ *L'Invention du quotidien*, p. 173.

³⁸ Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: Découverte, 2010), p. 203.

circulation' are examined in Chapter Four in a discussion which centres on Monénembo's exiled subjects.³⁹

As will be seen in Chapter One of the thesis, although there is a reasonably large corpus of literature on the Peul people group, little has been written on their interaction with space. Monénembo's fiction steps into a gap left by anthropology here and, responding to various theorists' signals, provokes a new consideration of people conditioning the spaces they inhabit. As mentioned above, the nomads in Monénembo's work are not only ethnically defined nomadic groups, but also political exiles, lost children, immigrants and soldiers.

What Monénembo articulates in the heterogeneity of his chosen individual characters is the scale of choice involved in such practices. Indeed, Mbembe highlights the personal and political agency of African subjects which he argues must feature in any representation of their identity. The re-casting of subjects to account for this power is taken up by Monénembo through the creation of characters who consciously utilise sets of tactics and resources, including a form of power Braidotti terms *potentia*. There is certainly a proliferation of nomadic mobility in each of Monénembo's texts, yet the degree of freedom and control available to characters varies widely. The author's creative writing, along with the intra-textual narrative processes he scribes, provide a context for expressing the complexity and limitations of spatial practice in a way that maps and city plans neglect. The structures of power within which these characters are (un)able to move are depicted meticulously in narratives which variously describe experiences of colonialism, post-independence autocracy, national and family tragedies, and it is the multi-layered construction in Monénembo's novels which subtly conveys and critiques such contexts.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 224.

On the subject of power, like James Scott, Certeau addresses the capacity of dominated subjects to practice any kind of resistance. Certeau writes of tactics: series of micro-activities employed with ruse to evade and manipulate strategies imposed upon their agents. These are moves and turns which operate on an imposed spatial field. I will argue that in the case of Monénembo's texts, these tactics are characterised by *débrouillardise*, a form of lucid street expertise whose key characteristics are inventiveness, readiness and mobility. This term, used by citizens of Kinshasa to describe the energy and spirit of survival that characterise everyday struggles in the city, is ideal for describing the spatial practices of Monénembo's subjects. In Kinshasa, *débrouillardise* is the local name for *mètis*, a Greek term for ambiguous techniques which change the apparent outcome of a struggle giving victory to the one who appeared to have been defeated.⁴⁰ The space inhabited by Monénembo's wandering characters is not easily their own; rather, they occupy a 'remainder space' and are therefore largely outside, underground, or, as I describe in Chapter Two, in the wings. Like Certeau's *bricoleur* and poacher, these nomad protagonists employ evasive practices to form resistance, and by doing so indicate their potential for other transformative engagement. Scriptural, vocal, and physical, these varying practices weave their way through Monénembo's texts to embody 'une manière d'être au monde'.⁴¹ To what extent this collective mindset or series of tactics are learned or acquired remains to be explored, but it is clear that Certeau's terms and incitements, once applied to contemporary African contexts, provide valuable springboards for the study to come.

⁴⁰ Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 38-9; 36.

⁴¹ *L'Invention du quotidien*, p. 147.

Roaming focalisation and *débrouillard* practice contribute to a mobile and resistant interaction with space which characterises Monénembo's everyday nomads.

Nomad studies in general, as called for by Noyes, and fictional representations such as Monénembo's, can go a long way in showing how scholarly space can be reconfigured in a more accommodating way. This is what Certeau's methodology seeks to accomplish, and what I will explore through this thesis.

Overview of thesis

Chapter One begins with a study of Monénembo's historiographical re-tellings of Peul lineage in *Peuls* (2004) and imperialism across West Africa in *Le Roi de Kahel* (2008). Though the former is the most condensed and explicit account of Peul history, narrated by a Serer ethnic cousin, the latter text also conveys historical events from an up-close point of view. Valentin Mudimbe's notion of *reprendre* is thread through this chapter to demonstrate how novel perspectives infuse familiar stories with irony, humour and intimacy.⁴² An initial description of the Peul people group, which draws on accounts by anthropologists, will reveal the need Monénembo seeks to meet for grounded representations which are neither Eurocentric nor Afrocentric in approach. Language, movement, and subjectivity are marked out as focal points in the author's postcolonial project. The chapter examines the significance of oral storytelling and ruse to the conditioning and maintaining of a particular Peul mindset or imaginary. The importance of ethnicity and encountering the Other will be made clear, but in such a way as to prepare for the subsequent chapters, whose subjects are not necessarily nomadic ethnically, but are always so culturally. The specific contexts of imperial and colonial power addressed here will sharpen the reader's eye for following chapters, where territorialisation happens on a different scale, in more nuanced and less overt ways.

⁴² Valentin Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 154.

Chapter Two considers Monénembo's representations of post-independence Guinea in two novels: *Les Crapauds-brousse* (1979) and *Les Écailles du ciel* (1986). Nganang's discussion of 'le roman de la dictature' will provide a helpful framework for exploring government corruption and violent rule in this period, particularly for the way different outworkings of power are interlinked.⁴³ The potential for resistance is delineated within a paradigm of covert and artful tactics which are conscious of and responsive to practices of domination. Monénembo takes his character-narrators into lesser-seen spaces in each of these novels, thus revealing shadowy remainder spaces and clandestine practices of conditioning space. Nganang (*Manifeste*), James Scott (*Domination and the Arts of Resistance*), and Braidotti (*Nomadic Subjects*), writing on people's interaction with city space beyond the view of those in power, provide helpful direction for analysing Monénembo's depiction of unstable life under a dictatorship. The uncertainty and danger of urban space is conveyed through recurring motifs and linguistic tensions. I suggest that a reading of Monénembo's fiction as everyday nomadic practice fits into what Nganang highlights as characteristic of postcolonial African subjectivity.

In the third chapter of the thesis, nomad subjects are seen as complex subjects who employ narrative strategies which are *débrouillard*. Moving outside of Guinea, and into more recent years, Chapter Three addresses the creative and political potential of lost voices. Based in Mamou (Guinea), Paris, and Kigali respectively, *Cinéma* (1997), his play *La Tribu des gonzesses* (2006), and *L'Aîné des orphelins* (2000), interrogate the role of storytelling in a fascinating way. The parallels between textual and geographical space are explored here as narratives performatively shape conceptual and political space. Echoing the underdog perspective of Chapter

⁴³ Nganang, p. 198.

Two, in these texts Monénembo focusses on the narratives of a teenage truant, a group of immigrant women, and a Rwandan orphan Faustin, born to a mixed Hutu-Tutsi couple: muted characters who negotiate multiple spaces and identities. My focus on such varied narrative perspectives reflects the novelist's remarkable adoption of different voices throughout his œuvre, and corroborates claims made by Homi Bhabha regarding the inherent ambivalence of national identity.⁴⁴

Throughout his writing, Monénembo narrates from multiple, mobile perspectives, showing that any narrative (be it national, postnational or transnational) is formed through dynamic encounters and varied stories. For this reason the work of other contributors to the Rwanda project, such as Véronique Tadjó and Boubacar Boris Diop, will be incorporated. Importantly, all protagonists in these novels and play are far from innocent – a key factor in Monénembo's re-casting of African subjects. Here their experiences feed into the author's wider portrayal of nomad subjects as self-writing agents who negotiate space against the odds. The incorporation of these three books anticipates Chapter Four where questions of exile and memory build on this examination of narrative practice.

Drawing to the end of the thesis, Chapter Four will have as its themes rupture and memory in a globalised world. Material elucidated in previous chapters will be revisited, relocated outside of Guinea to draw parallels with what Monénembo calls 'des jumeaux sur les deux bords de l'Océan' (*Pelourinho*, p. 30). Nomadic thought is seen in the postcolonial African diaspora, as readings of *Un Rêve utile* (1991), *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), *Pelourinho* (1995) and *Le Terroriste noir* (2012) reveal parallels between West Africa, South America, and Europe. In particular, this chapter investigates the effects of exile on storytelling. In *Un Rêve utile*, a young Guinean negotiates tough city life in Lyon having fled his native country. *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* follows the unfolding drama of a group

⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.

of friends in Bidjan preparing for one's departure to Europe. *Le Terroriste noir* sees the posthumous honouring of a *tirailleur sénégalais* from Guinea as he is remembered by villagers who lived alongside him in the Vosges. With *Pelourinho*, Monénembo follows a young man from West Africa to Brazil as he journeys in search of relatives whose heritage leads back to the 18th century transportation of slaves. Exile, in each of these cases, is an experience of distancing and separation, but one which also leads to learning and discovery. These experiences in turn lead to the creation of narratives and new senses of belonging.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis, the rationale for its chronological structure will become fully clear, as the persistent focus on concepts of mobile response to power, collective nomadic imaginary, and *littérature engagée* are tied together. Having highlighted a number of important concerns affecting postcolonial African subjects, Monénembo's identity as Peul, exile, and nomad, will be reassessed. I will also address his experiences of exile, the integration of his biography and fiction, and in the light of his recent return to live in Guinea, his trajectory as a creative writer. Combining important contemporary theorists with the everyday stories of nomadic practice as represented by Tierno Monénembo, the *débrouillard* everyday subject is shown as an empowered agent affecting change. The hope is that such a study will in some way respond to Certeau's call for heterology in critical analysis, and Noyes' appeal for grounded narratives of nomad subjects, within at least Francophone postcolonial studies.

Chapter One: Re-writing history

Peuls (2004) and Le Roi de Kahel (2008)

Introduction

In this first chapter I will introduce two key questions which come at the centre of Monénembo's postcolonial project. They concern the interfaces between past and present, and between history and literature. Through his attention to the history of Peul people, we see an interrogation of received historical narratives, as well as an attempt to rework generic categorisation in a move to reframe this people's history. His favouring of Olivier de Sanderval allows for a thorough re-casting of this previously sidelined figure, and one which highlights the longstanding and complex relationship between France and Guinea. An analysis of these two texts as a rewriting of history also awakens us to three connected themes, all of which reoccur across Monénembo's oeuvre. These are **language, movement, and subjectivity** and are of paramount importance to the author's aims to recast the modern African subject. Where the focus of these two texts is the Peul people, the thesis will subsequently consider nomadic subjects more generally. Beginning with a people group specifically located (in time and space) provides us with tangible examples of the patterns drawn out in the remainder of the thesis, thus helpfully focussing our attention on the themes and questions which will prove most important throughout. This chapter aims to show the beginnings of how a nomadic way of being is inscribed in the writing of Monénembo and how this prepares us to focus on Monénembo's postcolonial project.

History appears in the margins of Monénembo's whole work, but in the 2000s (his four latest published texts) it is centralised. Since it is his most recent priority, it

deserves first place in this thesis. Reading *Le Roi de Kahel* and *Peuls* is also helpful for establishing a sense of Guinea's history so that subsequent chapters can be read in that context. In the first chapter, these two texts will be read in parallel since, as will be seen, they are somewhat self-completing, and certainly feature the same aspects of Monénembo's re-writing. *Le Roi de Kahel* (henceforth *Roi*) is a novelistic account of the imperial explorations of Olivier de Sanderval in the late nineteenth century. Gathering content from Sanderval's original account and other fieldwork, Monénembo re-works it into a third person narrative of the explorer's exploits prior to France's colonisation of the region. In *Peuls* Monénembo narrates the history of this ethnic group from the 1400s to the late nineteenth century. Here he spans a far wider geographical space and time period than *Roi*, re-telling the genealogies and movements of Peul people in Western Africa. The historical narrative, though lengthy, reads as an extended collection of anecdotes, since told to a young Peul addressee interested in his people's history. Monénembo's narrative creativity renders both these accounts original re-writings of existing stories.¹

In drawing both marginalised figures and marginalised stories into the centre of his oeuvre, Monénembo gives a stage to forgotten parts of history. In part, his choice to publish these two books is a deliberate response to discrimination Peuls suffered at the hands of Sékou Touré during his later years as president of Guinea.² This also comes in a challenge to received notions of historicisation more generally, and questions dominant narratives which might sweep over flaws, mishaps, or imperfections and neglect heroes of the everyday. Adama Coulibaly labels this

¹ The term re-telling could be equally helpful, given the oral characteristics of the narratives discussed here.

² Scott Strauss, *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), p. 118.

kind of writing a ‘historicité faible’ or low-key history.³ Indeed, these texts introduce to us Monénembo’s sustained focus on the everyday. In novels like *Pelourinho* and *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* this is more obviously localised in the streets of urban settings, the city being for Patrice Nganang ‘le lieu de définition de la subjectivité de l’africain d’aujourd’hui’.⁴ Still, here too there is a definite sense of grounded-ness which counters Afrocentrist historiography.

What this constitutes, in short, is an act of taking up, or *reprendre*, as this notion is understood by Valentin Mudimbe in *The Idea of Africa*.⁵ The Congolese thinker, in his analysis of artistic productions, explores the porous nature of that boundary between past and present. He examines artists who seem to distort traditional forms of art by taking inspiration from them then shifting emphases and altering certain elements to produce new creations.⁶ In this way they transcend the apparent divide between past and present, and show themselves to be both modern and influenced by traditional techniques. Similar temporal displacements are to be found in text. Monénembo takes up and re-shapes narratives and narrated subjects, recasting and repositioning them in his and our contemporary contexts. As he pulls apart a notion of history as essentialist or cohesive, he gives an indication of how present and future stories and figures could be recorded and remembered. Monénembo’s re-inscriptions can be seen as an allegory for the wider possibilities available to the postcolonial subject.⁷ In the coming chapters we will see other subjects take those up in creative endeavours of resistance and storytelling which are always conditioned and enabled by their mobility.

³ Adama Coulibaly, ‘L’historicité faible chez Tierno Monénembo’, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman: Histoire, exil, écriture*, ed. Bernard De Meyer and Papa Samba Diop (= *Littératures et cultures francophones hors d’Europe*, 8 (2014)), pp. 9-28 (p. 15).

⁴ Patrice Nganang, *Manifeste d’une nouvelle littérature africaine* (Paris: Homnisphères, 2007), p. 263.

⁵ Valentin Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 154.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁷ Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 94.

Peuls in literature

To place Monénembo's rewriting project in a helpful context, it is useful to establish what tradition of literature about Peuls exists, within and/or alongside which we might read his work. Here we take a cursory glance at a broad range of literature featuring nomads and, where possible, Peuls specifically, which provides different lenses on their history. This is to address how Peul stories in general, and in particular the story of Peul origins, have been written, and subsequently what this entails for Monénembo's own project of writing, specifically what renders Monénembo's two novels original works of re-writing.

Reviewing this corpus of literature on Peuls and nomads, it becomes clear that the concept of invention is a common and important one. In *The Invention of Africa*, Mudimbe assesses how sets of cultural discourses have become embedded in the rational field over time, and have come to constitute received ideas about Africa, its peoples, and its history.⁸ He centres his book on the processes of invention which are at work forming the identity and dynamics of a culture, and unpicks the discourses which, through different historical periods, contribute to and critique popular interpretations of what Africa means.⁹ What comes below is in no way an assessment of the whole of Africanist discourse; Mudimbe addresses that. My aim rather is to identify a number of important 'inventors' from pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods to give an indication of the kinds of texts feeding into understandings of Peuls and Africans over time.

Mudimbe clarifies two meanings of the Latin word from which 'invention' comes: in + venire gives us both the sense of meeting with, encountering, and then also

⁸ Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1978] 2003); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978).

⁹ Mudimbe, *The Idea*, p. xiii.

discovering or making new through re-appropriation.¹⁰ His examples of Congolese artists show that art forms and their wider domains of artistic production are affected as encounters occur between tradition and contemporary ‘invention’.¹¹ I will show via Monénembo’s historical re-writings that invention is also largely to do with relocation, thus of the highest importance for mobile narratives and subjects who are continually re-located. By resituating a text (or subject) in a new time and inter-textual network (or community), different encounters are produced (it comes across and is come across afresh), and the text (or subject) is itself reinvented. It is of course important to underline that the narratives of invention are always formulated *for* somebody, that is, with particular aims and a chosen audience. This is as well as being shaped by the conditions and demands of their specific political and historical context. Monénembo’s own postcolonial project shows signs of a shifting agenda over his four decades of publishing history, as will become clear through this thesis.

Here we consider no more than a brief sample of texts which have been selected as representative of their respective times and as exemplars of distinct generic approaches to the representation of Peuls. The texts in this literature review stand as examples of the productive influence of text on cultural conceptions of people: in addressing a selection from different time periods we are able to see how Peuls have been invented and re-invented through being re-written across colonial and postcolonial periods. The selection below is indicative of the most influential texts on these processes of invention and reinvention, and follows Monénembo’s own select bibliography at the end of *Peuls* (489-90). Tracing nomads through this corpus of literature has been aided by addressing a number of primary textual categories. First, anthropological texts which describe ethnicity, demographics, and cultural practices. These range in style from empirical data records to polemic

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 163.

narratives and, as will be seen below, are key in European inventions of Peul identity. The second category of literature is the relatively recent theoretical writing on nomadology, pioneered by Gilles Deleuze, which proposes a way of viewing the world in terms of mobility. The third category, where Monénembo himself most obviously belongs, is in fictional writing. Here I mention texts in Peul and in French.

These categories are of course more nuanced and porous than this initial delineation might suggest. Indeed, as will be shown throughout this thesis, it is the very crossover of fictional narrative, renewed historiography, and political critique which is central to Monénembo's writing. His reworking of Peul history into a novel in *Peuls* innovatively adds to the corpus reviewed below, also putting Guinea, and Fulani peoples, on the map of 2000s postcolonial writing. The ethnic focus is less exclusive in *Roi*, but the same commitment to present past figures is clear. Indeed Monénembo's re-writings of history (which form the basis of this chapter) contain such an intersection of temporalities and genres that they constitute a new space in the area of Peul literature.

Ethnography

As James Clifford articulates in *The Predicament of Culture*, the discipline of anthropology only came into being in the 1930s, when publications by Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown heralded the establishment of scientific participant observation as a professional norm, bringing together theoretical cultural analysis and empirical research.¹² Earlier texts, though anthropological in nature then, were not consciously written into that discipline. My labelling of them here is deliberately anachronistic with the aim of grouping together inter-texts

¹² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 28.

which provide an indication (by no means comprehensive) of the ethnographic writing on Peuls to which Monénembo had recourse. Alexander Gordon Laing and Hyacinthe Hecquard provided some of the most comprehensive accounts of Peul history and culture, following travels in the early 19th century.¹³ Building on these, ethnographic studies which included notes on vocabulary and details of Peul culture appeared in 1844, published by W.B. Hodgson, an American consul in Algiers who also translated a number of texts.¹⁴ Around the time of the European partition of Africa, anthropological studies by explorers such as Ernest Noirot (1885) and Jean-Marie Bayol (1888) provide records of their encounters with the nomadic world of West Africa.¹⁵ These built on earlier accounts by missionaries and traders such as Godefroi Loyer and Pruneau de Pommegorge.¹⁶ Olivier de Sanderval's own *De l'Atlantique au Niger par le Foutah-Djallon, carnet de voyage* (1882) gives an in-depth account of his journey through West Africa and particularly Fouta-Djallon (Haute Guinée). His account is of special interest to us because Monénembo re-works it in *Le Roi de Kahel*. In what follows we consider Sanderval as a figure recast. Managing the 'dialectic of experience and interpretation' is a challenge common to Olivier de Sanderval and Tierno Monénembo, who both do kinds of fieldwork prior to producing a text.¹⁷ Both are directly inspired in that production by ways of being which they observe: the former largely from his Peul encounters, the latter from a breadth of influences including textual encounters which stretch from Flaubert to Dostoyevsky.¹⁸

¹³ Laing, Alexander Gordon, *Travels in the Timannee, Kooranko and Soolima Countries in Western Africa* (London: John Murray, 1825); Hyacinthe Hecquard, *Voyage sur la Côte et dans l'Intérieur de l'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1852).

¹⁴ William Hodgson, *Notes on Northern Africa, the Sahara and the Soudan* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844).

¹⁵ Details of these published works can be found in the bibliography.

¹⁶ Roland Lebel summarises these earlier texts in his introduction to *L'Afrique Occidentale dans la Littérature Française* (Paris: Harmattan, 2014 [Emile Larose, 1925]), pp. 7-38.

¹⁷ Clifford, p. 34.

¹⁸ Nicholas Elliott, trans. 'Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A with Author Tierno Monénembo', <<http://www.amazon.com/The-King-Kahel-Tierno-Mon%C3%A9nembo/dp/0982555075>> [accessed 20 March 2015].

Of course the position, perspective and creativity of the writing subject have been examined at length, including with regards to African thought. Relying on Foucauldian understandings of discourse in a similar vein to Saïd's *Orientalism*, Mudimbe's seminal *The Invention of Africa* interrogates processes of inventing and translating African alterity. The researcher's subjective interpretation must be attended to, particularly in Western representations of African thought. This notion is central to our study of Monénembo's re-writing project, and it is interesting to consider the role of invention in ethnographic writing more broadly. A famous ethnographic inventor of African cultures is Marcel Griaule, whose dedication to Dogon culture saw it translated and framed in a particular way for Western recipients. Although critiqued along with Maurice Delafosse for relying too heavily on an essentialist construction of an absolute subject, Griaule nonetheless highlights for us the importance of examining specific inventions through texts.

Gilbert Vieillard (a student of Delafosse) published, among others, *Notes sur les coutumes des Peuls au Fouta-Djallon* in 1939.¹⁹ Vieillard, a key inventor in Peul representation, features here because he was remarkably different to his colonial colleagues. His attention to the complex rules of Peul culture was noteworthy, surrounded as he was by ideology that represented black subjects as primitive and childlike.²⁰ Where his other volumes concentrate on Peul oral literature, in this text the prolific ethnologist and colonial administrator writes on the cultural practices and social structures of Peuls (in whose language the text was thought out before being written in French). In his correspondence with his mother, we find the same intention to rewrite and make present which Monénembo demonstrates:

¹⁹ Gilbert Vieillard, *Notes sur les coutumes des Peuls au Fouta-Djallon* (Paris: Larose, 1939).

²⁰ Malon, Claude, 'Gilbert Vieillard, administrateur et ethnologue en Afrique occidentale (1926-1939)', in *Cahiers de sociologie économique et culturelle, ethnopsychologie*, 33 (2000) 107-131 (p. 115).

Je me suis jeté dans la recherche des manuscrits arabes et peuls et je traduis à tire-larigot des chroniques locales et de la théologie, que je fais recopier par les meilleurs calligraphes du pays. C'est te dire que je vis en 1355 de l'ère musulmane plus qu'en 1936, mais comme l'humanité est une dans le temps et dans l'espace, rien n'est inactuel. Puis il serait fâcheux que ces curieux documents d'une peuplade noire soient perdus

(A sa mère, Mamou, 20 février 1936).²¹

It is the collapse of temporal and geographical spaces in his acts of writing which grab our attention here, and will be given further thought later in this chapter. His decidedly modern claim that the homogeneity of humanity allows us to understand and situate the Other in our own present chimes both with Mudimbe's notion of *reprendre* and Monénembo's enactment of it, in its infusion of the present with the past. He recognises the ingenuity of the Peul people despite others' tendency to ignore it, and positions himself as a learner more than a superior instructor.

Processes of inventing Africa shifted with the end of the colonial era. Later ethnographic writing in the decades following independence saw more specialised studies on particular areas of interest. Marguerite Dupire stands out as providing a thorough and unbiased study of the Wodaabe from the Nigerian Sahel. Her *Peuls nomades: étude descriptive des Wodaabe du Sahel Nigérien* is a brilliantly detailed series of descriptions of living arrangements, family relations, financial habits, lineage and traditions, always writing in an objective yet personal tone, evidence of her two years of fieldwork.²² In relation to narratives of history, it is significant that part III of this volume is entitled 'Histoires et légendes' and features summaries

²¹ Cited in O'Reilly R.P. Patrick, *Gilbert Vieillard. Mon ami l'Africain*, (Dijon: Edition privée non-commerciale, 1942) <<http://www.webfuuta.net/bibliotheque/patrick-oreilly/administrateur-adjoint.html>> [accessed 3 December 14].

²² Marguerite Dupire, *Peuls nomades: étude descriptive des Wodaabe du Sahel Nigérien* (Paris: Institut d'ethnologie, 1962).

and various versions of Wodaabe legends, all of which help to establish a cultural context in which to understand these nomad people but which, Dupire claims, cannot be taken as fact ‘en l’absence de documents historiques précis’.²³ Her rather traditional assumption that written sources would guarantee a truthful record of the past will be contested as we consider the role of fiction in historiography here and later in the thesis. The assumption is also that written archives are more trustworthy than oral documents, yet in terms of accuracy, originality, and appropriateness for ethnographic documentation, Monénembo displays just how significant orality can be.

The overwhelming sense of nomad character which prevails in Dupire’s volume is one of resilient *débrouillardise* – a trait apparent right across the literary oeuvre of Monénembo. Thus she concludes of the Wodaabe:

A travers les vicissitudes de leur histoire, tantôt sous la protection des vainqueurs, riches et propriétaires de captifs, tantôt dominés par les maîtres du pays ou leurs propres frères islamisés, ils sont néanmoins parvenus, non seulement à conserver leur liberté et une partie de leur patrimoine culturel, mais encore à se reconstituer en tribu.²⁴

Monénembo chooses similarly to base his texts on fieldwork, also emphasising such *débrouillard* tendencies in his depiction of Peuls (their ruse in particular). His incorporation of orality into the novels is expertly worked, and moves away from Dupire here in persistently inflecting history with elements of humour and criticism.

These ethnographic texts are somewhat distinct from another more historicising body of literature, which we situate within a continuing discourse of Afrocentrism.

²³ Dupire, p. 31. This is a concern not always shared by authors writing about West African people groups, as will become clear below.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

Promulgated largely by African Americans in the United States, Afrocentrism emerged in response to Eurocentric descriptions of Africa which persisted in racist colonial portrayals of the continent and its people. Stephen Howe summarises the movement as a re-imagining of Africa under the idea that all Africans and Blacks around the world hold a common heritage and experience, and this has been trampled on by Europeanism, to which it is directly opposed.²⁵ For its significance as a stage in the ongoing postcolonial inventions of Africa, I would describe it as a rewriting movement in itself. Howe's volume, as well as providing a thorough account of the progression of Afrocentrism and its reception, claims that the movement has shown very little engagement with the problems of contemporary Africa.

Their Africa...is an imaginary place, without a real human history (as opposed to the mythographies of conquering kings, superheroes, and bucolic bliss which they construct) as well as without a present: not only without hunger, military coups, gender inequality and genocide, but equally without TV stations or traffic jams, human rights movements and contemporary artistic creativity.²⁶

In an essay exploring decolonisation in Africa, Mbembe critiques this kind of limited formation of narrative, labelling the *réflexe indigéniste* that tendency to define what is African according to race, without factoring in the multidirectional, global movements which affect cultural identity. He insists that 'l'histoire culturelle du continent ne se comprend guère hors du paradigme de l'itinérance, de la mobilité et du déplacement'.²⁷ The biggest omission thus comes in Afrocentrists' failure to locate the depicted subjects, both temporally and spatially, and to account

²⁵ Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 4.

²⁶ Ibid., p.13.

²⁷ Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: Découverte, 2010), p. 227.

for movement. Conversely, Monénembo's writing is founded on these concerns. He challenges myth by grounding stories in the contemporary everyday, including in the instability and violence which plagues Guinea today. His historical texts arguably show some of the origins of this postcolonial condition, but also locate Peuls in a tangible past which is neither glorified nor blameless. By addressing continuity in this way, Monénembo renders the past present, making it comprehensible, and at the same time emphasises the contemporaneity of aspects of the past, focussing on the personal, and on the everyday. The versatility of fiction gives him the capacity to scribe the nuances and complexities of distinct eras and situations, whilst highlighting a common imaginary between subjects, unlike Vieillard who posits a subjectivity which is atemporal as well as aspatial. The major preoccupation of Afrocentrists (as of Vieillard) is with origins, specifically ancient origins, and an overinsistence on African historicity dominates in a large number of Afrocentrist texts, with the heaviest focus resting on race. Though he is interested in origins, Monénembo's rewriting of Peul history is not preoccupied with the theme, and indeed rejects this vein in its shift of perspective, spatialized focus, and irreverent tone: all areas examined below.

Two partisans of the Afrocentrist cause without a specifically African American agenda are Cheikh Anta Diop and Martin Bernal. Diop's persistent focus on Egypt seems politically directed, with a view to urging development of the African continent which would place it on an equal footing with Europe.²⁸ Yet certain sweeping statements are left without corroboration: 'L'organisation sociale de la vie africaine épouse exactement celle de l'Égypte.'²⁹ It is also clear how Diop follows in the vein of Leo Frobenius and Maurice Delafosse who had started

²⁸ Howe, p.169.

²⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations, nègres et cultures* (Paris: Editions africaines, 1955), p. 126.

mystifying Africa decades before.³⁰ Diop promotes the religious, linguistic, and cultural unity of Africa for an African audience knee-deep in rising nationalism. He draws on pan-Africanist ideology, evident though its contradictions are.³¹

British born Martin Bernal was more interested in Greek origins, and made it his aim in *Black Athena* to unveil the debt Greek culture owed to Africa and the Middle East, which he argued had been effaced by 19th century historians.³² He deduced that because of rising anti-Semitism and racism, and the rise of nationalism and colonialism in Europe, Egyptian and Semitic ancestors were written out of the story. This is yet another interesting example of contemporary politics shaping the content of official historical accounts and engendering necessary subsequent re-writings. Bernal, like Howe, Mudimbe and others, highlights the importance of the notion of invention. Unlike the inventing work of Griaule, and Afrocentrist narratives which tend to homogenise and which suffer from Mbembe's *réflexe indigéniste*,³³ the kind of invention which occupies us in this chapter is more supple and dynamic. In his cross-genre re-writing project, Monénembo displays the kind of staged encounters Certeau and Mudimbe place as central to their definition of invention. By resituating certain historical narratives within fresh combinations of genre and voice, Monénembo presents them afresh to modern readers. As I will demonstrate, the reader comes across epic and novel, oral storytelling, nomadic practices, and reconfigured subjects. Our key theme of subjectivity is of course important here, since every 'coming across' requires an encounter with difference. The whole series of changing discourses on Africa and

³⁰ See for example Maurice Delafosse, *L'âme nègre* (Paris: Payot, 1922) and *Les civilisations disparues: les civilisations négro-africaines* (Paris: Stock, 1925).

³¹ Valentin Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 79.

³² Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987).

³³ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 229. That is, the tendency to celebrate difference without considering how some of those celebrated forms and customs were, in fact, invented by the colonisers.

Peuls is characterised by the same kinds of encounters that condition Monénembo's fictional subjects. This is but one example of how the author's intra-textual representations imitate the kinds of practices which go on in real time. Just as his subjects and their narratives shape space, so different encounters between discourses and political agendas condition postcolonial space outside of the texts. This is the contested space within and from which Monénembo develops his project.

This is to give an idea of what kind of ethnographic precedents there are to Monénembo's texts, and in particular to highlight prominent inventors in discourses on Africa. Of course these have not been limited to writing on Peuls, but perhaps give a flavour of the invention and emphases in writing on ethnicity and origins which have emerged through colonial and postcolonial periods. I turn now to theoretical writing.

Theory

The introduction to this thesis briefly outlines theoretical writing on nomads. I return to this now in more detail, in order to reveal the space which exists between these texts and those introduced above. It is into this space that Monénembo writes, whilst speaking both to anthropological and more abstract theoretical bodies of literature.

Moving subjects' interaction with space has received significant attention in contemporary theoretical writing. Deleuze and Guattari in their focus on (de/re)territorialisation mark a distinctive move away from addressing origins. Indeed describing nomads in *A Thousand Plateaus* they write that 'they have no history; they only have a geography', and they use nomadic figures to explore a

state of being which resists hierarchical and striated organisation.³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari turn our attention not only to space, but to the specific locations of subjects' intellectual and social practices.³⁵ Unlike migrants, who are reterritorialized (and travel as a means to an end), nomads live in a state of constant deterritorialization, moving away from the centre in continuous processes of becoming.³⁶ Important for our exploration of Monénembo's fictional subjects is that nomadic thought defines these processes as both relational (not autonomous, but interconnected with other beings) and situated (in and for the present, grounded in particular conditions). In a work that advocates maintaining distance from critical systems and attending to the contexts and experiences of diverse subjects, Saïd rejects the simple opposition between texts and the world. He describes the former's situatedness: 'as texts they *place* themselves...and they *are* themselves by acting, in the world'.³⁷ For Monénembo, the specific location of subjects and texts proves persistently significant for their constitution, and this will be discussed at length in this thesis.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, in her theoretical writing Rosi Braidotti points out that the nomadic state is defined not by physical movement, but by consciousness-raising and the subversion of set conventions.³⁸ Yet simultaneously attention must be given to the spatial and temporal locations of a subject.³⁹ Her aim is to redesign subjectivity as a process of becoming nomad, whereby mainstream subject positions are challenged by marginal subjects who address the need to destabilize

³⁴ Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988), p. 393.

³⁵ Rose Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 4.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 443.

³⁷ Edward Saïd, 'The Text, the World, the Critic', *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 8:2 (1975), 1-23 (p. 9).

³⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

and activate the centre.⁴⁰ Here we can identify parallels with postcolonial writers like Monénembo, who brings historically marginalised figures (Olivier de Sanderval, Addi Bâ) into the centre of his texts to challenge pre-established, exclusive notions of historicisation. Nomadic thought goes further, to argue that in such movements there is an enactment of agency indicative of the wider, collective energy with which nomadic subjects have the potential to alter the present.⁴¹ This kind of positive power, or *potentia*, is manifested in the emergent resistance to the controlling mechanisms of dictatorship which we address in Chapter Two. There I show how those practices are simultaneously highly conscious and firmly grounded. In short, nomadic thinking is about undoing dominant representations and the static authority of the past.⁴²

Dick Pels contests the primacy of such theory, arguing that the ‘discourse of nomadism has recently turned into a cognitive plaything of the educated elite, into its newest fad in self-stylization and self-celebration’.⁴³ Pels’ concern is that by using nomads as an allegory for intellectual trajectories, critical thinkers risk sidelining very real struggles and injustices for an attractive notion of innovative mobility.

Construing the migrant, exile or nomad as alter ego of the modern intellectual, or beyond this, as a privileged metaphor for modern subjectivity, often leads towards an intellectualist domestication and appropriation of the experiences of ‘real-life’ migrants or exiles, while it simultaneously euphemizes the comparatively settled, sedentary and privileged situation of academics, who are invited to indulge fictions

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴¹ Rosi Braidotti, ‘Thinking as a Nomadic Subject’, Lecture (Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, 7 October 2014).

⁴² Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, p. 2.

⁴³ Dick Pels, ‘Privileged Nomads: On the Strangeness of Intellectuals and the Intellectuality of Strangers’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16:1 (1999), 63-86, p. 64.

of social 'weightlessness' and dreams of perpetual transcendence in boundary-breaking journeys of the critical mind.⁴⁴

The danger is that the very situatedness promised by nomadic theory is neglected, and the actual experiences of marginalised subjects are altogether forgotten.

Answering her critics, Braidotti writes that being a nomad is not a metaphor but a critical tool.

I rather see nomadic subjectivity as both an analytic tool and a creative project aimed at a qualitative shift of consciousness that is attuned to the spirit of our age. The ultimate purpose is to compose significant sites for reconfiguring modes of belonging and political practice.⁴⁵

In response to Pels (et al; Gedalof 2000, Boer 1996, Felski 1997) she defends her critique as very much grounded:

my nomadic subject pursues the same critique of power as black and postcolonial theories, not in spite, but because of the fact that it is located somewhere else. Philosophical nomadism addresses, in both a critical and creative manner, the role of the former center in redefining power relations.⁴⁶

Whilst aware that different forms of nomadism require different socioeconomic references, her aim is to challenge the status quo at a theoretical level by enacting a vision of the subject that encompasses changes at the in-depth structures.

Where the theoretical impetus of her work does shift attention away from 'real-life' nomads, Braidotti highlights the worth of focussing on nomadic subjects in an

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

exploration of subjectivity which is committed to cultural, political, epistemological, and ethical concerns. She is looking for adequate ways to represent this, and I argue that Monénembo's fictionalisation of real life occurrences presents a partial solution.

Noyes alerts us to the same pursuit in his appeal for a middle ground between theory and anthropology, and for a thorough interrogation of the problematic move from nomadism (as a lifestyle) to nomadology (as a model for critical thought). For him, the specific historical and economic coordinates of nomadology, in other words, the points at which it connects with nomadism, are 'precisely where the usefulness of this idea resides for postcolonial theory.'⁴⁷ The relevance of nomadism is undoubtable, especially (as Braidotti, Thrift and others contend) when examining intellectual responses to advanced capitalism.⁴⁸ For critical agendas to be articulated in terms of social realities in a way that remains politically cogent,⁴⁹ our understanding of nomadic subjectivity must be grounded in postcolonial situations. This, I argue, is where literature can play a role, bridging the gap which persists between postcolonial nomadism and abstract nomadology. Fiction allows for the innovative expression of nomadic thought whilst simultaneously providing a situated representation and critique of the postcolonial world as encountered by its subjects.

It is my aim to locate Monénembo's writing on Peuls and other nomadic subjects on a middle ground of fictional representation. Where early anthropological writing may find itself stuck in the quagmire of Euro or Afrocentric thought, and leaves little room for creativity, nomadic theory risks exaggerating the latter and losing sight of real-life experience. It is worth noting again that Monénembo

⁴⁷ John Noyes, 'Nomadism, nomadology, postcolonialism: By way of introduction', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 6:2 (2004), 159-168 p. 165.

⁴⁸ See Nigel Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 230. Thrift views social and political space in terms of mobility, describing, for example, financial systems and global cities as nomadic networks.

⁴⁹ Noyes, p. 167.

himself is Peul, exile, intellectual and migrant, inscribed with nomadic experience. As I stated above, his fiction recasts the African subject within a framework of nomadic subjectivity at the same time as mapping or locating the subjects in *la rue* (Nganang) of the everyday. Helped by nomadic theory, our analysis finds its grounding by applying a number of Certeau's principal concepts to literary texts (as explained in the Introduction to this thesis). Thus Monénembo gives us something like Braidotti's nomadism: 'nomadic thought [and representation of nomadic experience] amounts to a politically invested [literary] cartography of the present condition of mobility in a globalized [postcolonial] world'.⁵⁰ In his corpus, both physical movement and nomadic thought help establish a critical view from which we can better understand the pre-, colonial, and postcolonial world. Additionally in the case of *Peuls* and *Le Roi de Kahel* this comes in texts which maintain an ethnographic focus whilst rewriting previous historical accounts.

In addition to Monénembo's, other recent fiction written in French about Peuls is not extensive. The two most prolific authors are Amadou Hampâté Bâ and Christiane Seydou. Hampâté Bâ's work counts a high number of traditional Peul *contes* translated and transcribed in French, as well as two memoirs and a novel. Seydou, long standing researcher and teacher of West African cultures, languages and literatures, has recorded and collaborated to translate scores of Peul poems and epics. One 2005 volume of *Études Littéraires Africaines* edited by Ursula Baumgardt (a former student of Seydou and a significant contributor to the field of Peul scholarship in her own right), provides a foray into Seydou's vast publications, and gives some idea of the breadth of her fieldwork.⁵¹ Seydou's published bibliography is unmatched for a thorough record of writing on Peuls.⁵²

⁵⁰ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 4 (my brackets).

⁵¹ Ursula Baumgardt, ed. 'Littérature peule', *Études Littéraires Africaines*, 19 (Paris: APELA, 2005).

⁵² Christiane Seydou, *Bibliographie générale du monde peul* (Niamey: Institut de recherches en sciences humaines, Université de Niamey, 1977).

The inter-textual dependence of this area of scholarship is highlighted in Baumgardt's interview with Seydou, where the latter explains that she learned the Peul language via texts from Vieillard's collection.⁵³ Bernard Mouralis' article in the same volume places Monénembo and *Peuls* at the heart of Peul historiography whilst simultaneously highlighting the novel's originality in establishing a balanced and insightful account which is neither colonial nor nationalist.⁵⁴

As well as retellings of traditional tales, a number of novels have been published in the past decade, which foreground Peul experience. *Visage peul* by Eric Fourreau, *Le Destin de Leldo Tara* by Oumar Diallo, *Hivernage* by Laurence Gavron, and *Une Vie de Peul* by Kolyang Taïwé are all worth mentioning.⁵⁵ Their protagonists varyingly navigate Peul worlds, acting as moving vehicles through which each author paints a picture of postcolonial experience. Three of these have been published in Paris, which perhaps indicates that Peuls have a more prominent place in European consciousness than in previous years. Monénembo's historical rewritings play a key role in this, repositioning Peuls in the global imaginary, going some way to right the wrongs of Sékou Touré's racist campaign against them.⁵⁶

Monénembo then can be seen to follow in Hampâté Bâ's footsteps, prompted similarly by personal experience but not expressly autobiographical like his Malian

⁵³ Ursula Baumgardt, 'Entretien avec Christiane Seydou', in *Littérature peule*, ed. Ursula Baumgardt (= *Études Littéraires Africaines*, 19 (2005)), pp. 21-26 (p. 21).

⁵⁴ Bernard Mouralis, 'Du roman à l'histoire: Tierno Monénembo, *Peuls*', in *Littérature peule*, ed. Baumgardt, pp. 43-49.

⁵⁵ Éric Fourreau, *Visage peul* (Paris: Collectif les Presseurs d'éponges, 2005), Oumar Abderrahmane Diallo, *Le Destin de Leldo Tara. Prince peuhl du Fouta Damga* (Paris: Harmattan, 2007), Laurence Gavron, *Hivernage* (Paris: Masque, 2009), Kolyang Taïwé, *Une Vie de Peul* (Yaoundé: Éditions CLÉ, 2012).

⁵⁶ An extensive corpus of Peul/Fula language texts is also available, but is beyond the scope of this thesis. Please see Mélanie Bourlet's article for an overview, and the following link for a comprehensive bibliography. Mélanie Bourlet, 'La littérature peule contemporaine: caractéristiques et enjeux', in *Littérature peule*, ed. Baumgardt, pp. 34-42. Columbia University Libraries, 'Fula Language Acquisitions at Columbia University Libraries', <http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/africa/subjects/fula_bibliography.html> [accessed 6 May 2014].

precursor. Monénembo's ethnographic endeavour in rewriting Peul histories shares Seydou's focus but he also stands apart as a distinctly literary author. Setting *Peuls* and *Le Roi de Kahel* in the context of Monénembo's wider corpus, I note a consistency of themes which in this chapter of the thesis will help draw attention to prominent concerns in his writing project. These are: space, movement, language, and the interrogation of those boundaries mentioned above, namely between history and literature, non-fiction and fiction, and past and present. This last binary is of most relevance to this chapter, since I present Monénembo as a unique teller of Peul history, aiming in these two texts to *reprendre* past stories and figures in a creative re-writing project.

By drawing out some of these inter-textual connections I hope to have shown that Monénembo is by no means writing outside of these historiographical discourses, but rather situates himself in an evolving tradition of writing Peuls. He is neither plagued by the *réflexe indigéniste* coined by Mbembe⁵⁷ nor is he fixed on a nomadology agenda. Rather, to a certain extent attending to Noyes' appeal, Monénembo takes up a middle ground, crossing boundaries of genre with his literary reinterpretations of history. It is here that room is made for creativity and innovation and the scene is set for an exploration of *débrouillard* practices.

For Braidotti, nomadic subjects are figurations (like Deleuze's conceptual personae): they are

creative expressions for the intensity, i.e., the rate of change,
transformation or affirmation, the *potentia* (positive power) one
inhabits. Nomadic subjects are transformative tools that enact

⁵⁷ Mbembe, p. 229.

progressive metamorphoses of the subject away from the program set up in the phallogocentric format.⁵⁸

As will be seen here and throughout the thesis, Monénembo seeks both to explore and display the potential for creativity and innovation, in part through a focus on storytelling. Fiction is uniquely placed for this, which is why Monénembo's reappropriation of historical accounts into novelistic form is an interesting starting point for our reading of his work. Where there is a danger, as Pels rightly highlights, of exaggerating a rhetoric of creativity and innovation, Monénembo bypasses this by writing on real-life nomads.⁵⁹ What is more, he both enacts and fictionally represents actual agency to mirror real postcolonial settings through creative storytelling. His *débrouillard*, innovative subjects are located in everyday reality and we see the start of this in these historical rewritings which arguably deterritorialise us by estranging us from the familiar, accepted notion of history. Monénembo's contribution is a unique act of *repandre* in which the space of Peul historiography we have just summarised is dynamically extended.

Rewriting Peul history

In the remainder of this chapter I will look at *Peuls* and *Le Roi de Kahel* as Monénembo's two most explicitly historical *récits* which in places echo the ethnographic and nomadological trajectories outlined above. This comes as one strand of his broader re-casting of African subjects. In both texts, Monénembo conveys Peul history in a new way, refreshing old stories with dynamic narrative perspective and a reworking of genre.

⁵⁸ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ 'Metaphorizing the nomad easily induces affectations of estrangement which support an exaggerated and self-complimentary rhetoric of creativity and innovation.' Pels, p. 72.

With *Peuls* and *Roi*, Monénembo somewhat anticipates Noyes' appeal by working an overriding trend of nomadic thought into historical events. His Peul characters are taken from longstanding legends, and yet the *débrouillardise* which they enact is decidedly modern, or even timeless. Monénembo thus highlights the presentness of the past, transcending walls which would seek to separate the period in question from our own. Such a shift stages an encounter between the reader and these central subjects, rendering the African a contemporary rather than a distant subject walled in to another time. Johannes Fabian terms the spatial and temporal distancing of the object commonly found in anthropology the 'denial of coevalness'. He defines this as '*a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse*'.⁶⁰ Conversely, Monénembo brings the subject close and destabilises any notion of fixed, separate time. Retelling these imperial and colonial narratives in 2004 and 2008, Monénembo reinvents them by situating them in new networks of texts and relations, just as Certeau describes his agents doing.⁶¹ African subjects are refigured, not mystified in the Afrocentrist vein, but presented as utterly human; 'l'accent est mis sur l'histoire et non sur le mythe'.⁶² They are taken up (as Mudimbe describes, see below) and their narratives reshaped within a corpus of Francophone postcolonial literature in the 2000s. Both works are highly original in terms of genre, language and narrative perspective, and in *Peuls* especially Monénembo creates a new narrative voice which moves between ethnography, history and fiction. Each of these elements of original re-writing will be addressed here, and I begin with genre.

⁶⁰ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Objects* (New York: Columbia University Press, [1983] 2002), p. 31.

⁶¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: California University Press, 1984), p. xiii.

⁶² Mouralis, in *Littérature peule*, ed. Baumgardt, p. 44.

Genre

In an interview with Ursula Baumgardt, Christiane Seydou emphasises the importance of genre in expressing different aspects of culture. She has found it interesting to investigate ‘comment et pourquoi une culture trouve dans tel genre particulier le moyen d’exprimer telle ou telle de ses composantes idéologiques et esthétiques fondamentales’.⁶³ Though host to a deceptively simple subtitle, ‘Roman’, the success of Monénembo’s *Peuls* comes in its capacity for rich cultural expression in multiple genres simultaneously, whilst remaining distinctly historical. What is more, the author reflects, via both texts’ narrators, on the multiple meanings inherent in the word *histoire*. As Steeve Renombo outlines, *histoire* refers simultaneously to ‘l’expérience vécue, son récit fidèle, sa fiction menteuse et son explication savante’ and in Monénembo we read ‘non seulement les modalités d’inscription de cette tension interne au mot ‘histoire’, mais aussi les stratégies discursives induites’.⁶⁴ There is a dynamic interaction between genres which enacts the kind of dialogic complexity put forward by Christopher Miller, whom Mudimbe calls an exemplary re-reader of African texts; ‘his expressed aim of placing literature and anthropology in dialogue represents an advance on those who would exalt anthropology as a mirror of African contexts and realities’.⁶⁵ This consists of bringing together anthropology and African literature in a more complex and comprehensive approach which accounts for the contradictions of interacting systems of thought.⁶⁶ Monénembo similarly does not dismiss precursory texts, but places them in some kind of counterbalance with deconstructionist theory and sets his fiction at the interface. In these written encounters of history and fiction, the very tensions are problematised by narrators

⁶³ Baumgardt, in *Littérature peule*, ed. Baumgardt, p. 26.

⁶⁴ Steeve Robert Renombo, ‘Portrait de l’écrivain en historien. Essai d’une poétique du savoir dans deux romans de Tierno Monénembo’, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, pp. 29-48 (p. 34).

⁶⁵ Mudimbe, *The Idea*, p. 184.

⁶⁶ Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 27.

who question the validity of their historiographical enterprise. When the Serer (in *Peuls*) and Olivier (in *Roi*) voice the difficulty of their endeavours, Monénembo automatically counters official records of ‘History’ which leave little room for questioning.

If this writing is labelled history, it is, as Coulibaly describes, *l’historicité faible*. That is, a form of historical writing which is low-key and makes room for narrativity and ingenuity rather than re-instating historiography which has been hegemonic. Monénembo pulls apart notions of a singular, cohesive history by enacting a re-writing project that centralises the *récit*. It becomes ‘history with’ alongside the following: ethnography, fiction, *conte*, genealogy, epic, diary, *récit de voyage*. In line with the depiction of Peuls we read, Monénembo’s own genre-mixing is a kind of strategic disturbing of the norm; ‘la force du nomade, dans le monde entier, c’est de gêner’.⁶⁷ This fits with Coulibaly’s definition of *l’historicité faible* which ‘s’inscrit dans une approche nouvelle qui ne manque pas de déconstruire les mécanismes hégémoniques’.⁶⁸

Indeed, there is a grouping of genres indicative of what Monénembo describes as ‘confluence’, a plural process of influence coming from multiple directions.⁶⁹ In a layering of different forms he brings together multiple sources in creatively reformulated ethnography. In *Peuls* the story is kept grounded by humour whilst being somewhat elevated by epic, and both are held together in a novel form which renews and revives Guinea.⁷⁰ The short bibliography at the novel’s end is indicative of Monénembo’s own fieldwork. There we find a relatively short list of ethnographic and historical works, to which the narrative repeatedly makes

⁶⁷ Florence Paravy, ‘Qui êtes-vous? Tierno Monénembo’, *Sépia*, 25 (1997), 2-9 (p. 5).

⁶⁸ Adama Coulibaly, ‘L’historicité faible chez Tierno Monénembo’, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, pp. 9-28 (p. 15).

⁶⁹ Elliott, ‘Amazon exclusive’.

⁷⁰ Elsa Costero, ‘Le roman mis en question’, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, pp. 83-98 (p. 96). ‘La représentation de l’histoire peule, constituée d’une anthologie mémorielle glorieuse, qui rompt avec l’épisode angoissant de l’Indépendance, permet à Tierno Monénembo de réinventer la terre natale et de renouer avec elle.’

reference, forming a kind of patchwork of sources which renders this novel far more textured than his others. It is studded with citations and footnotes from these sources (see for example 70-73, 77, 92-93, 103). In *Roi*, Oliver de Sanderval's *récit de voyage* is retold in novelistic form from a third person perspective. The centrality of the protagonist's self-description also makes the novel a kind of biography, amidst the historical exploits which are retold. This intertextual constellation is made clear by reading Sanderval's own *Carnet de voyage*, which will be explored below.

To illustrate this heterogeneity of genre and form we turn to the epigraphs from *Peuls*, which each flag up different elements of the text which follows. Though subtitled *Roman*, *Peuls* is by no means typical of the author's choices of genre. Where parallel themes appear in *Peuls* and his other books, in terms of style and content it stands alone. The citations which stand as epigraphs give some idea of this, and point to the multiplicity of sources on which Monénembo bases his text. The first recalls Egyptian God Horus and is a citation attributed to Moses, via the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber:

Voici le misérable étranger. Il ne demeure pas au même endroit, ses pieds cheminent sans trêve. Depuis l'époque d'Horus, il combat, il n'a pas la victoire, il n'est pas vaincu (Peuls, 7).

Immediately myth is inserted beside philosophy, in a citation from an Egyptian tablet which paradoxically places Egyptian origins at the head of a text which will counter Afrocentric idealisations of the past. In a similar vein to Brazilian author Milton Hatoum, Monénembo threads myth through his text.⁷¹ He opens the main body of *Peuls* with myth, re-writing the logocentric Judeo-Christian norm, '*Au commencement, la vache,*' and references Peul cosmogony throughout the novel.

⁷¹ See for example Milton Hatoum, *Órfaos do Eldorado* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008).

Any mythical focus tends to address the origins of the universe as a whole, or the role of nature as a vehicle of memory and history, rather than the beginnings of African people. This comes alongside inter-ethnic teasing which defines the tone of the novel and will be explored below; also hinted at by the second epigraph citing Bambara mockery from Hampaté Bâ. The third epigraph, a Bambara proverb, '*Le Peul se connaît*', hints at the transfer of oral culture which is threaded through the text. And the fourth, derogatory in tone, '*Le Peul est le parasite du bœuf*', is from Gilbert Vieillard, the aforementioned ethnologist (all *Peuls*, 7).

This is not just another historical account. The effects of such variability of genre and source include a simultaneous sense of weight and seriousness (citing ethnographic authorities) and a lightness (via the humorous proverbs). Equally the generic originality of *Roi* comes from its status as a *récit de voyage refaçoné*. Since this sense of renewed writing applies to content as well as style, neither text sits neatly within the categories highlighted above (distinctly ethnography, theory, or fiction). In spite of regular references to their ethnographic precursors throughout, Monénembo's novelistic creativity sets these apart.

James Clifford has of course defined ethnography as its own politicised and literary genre, and always interpretative. He shows that 'ethnographic texts are orchestrations of multivocal exchanges occurring in politically charged situations. The subjectivities produced in these often unequal exchanges...are constructed domains of truth, serious fictions'.⁷² There are parallels with literary fiction, such as the commitment in both to some representation of different worlds: 'ethnography is the interpretation of cultures'.⁷³ There is also in both the space to express what Mikhail Bakhtin terms heteroglossia: a multiplicity of voices,

⁷² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 10.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 39.

subcultures and factions, as conditioned by their place and time.⁷⁴ Yet the novel is unique both in its development of subjectivities, and in the discursive complexity and number of different styles it can accommodate and organise artistically. Where ‘ethnographers have generally refrained from ascribing beliefs, feelings, and thoughts to individuals’,⁷⁵ novelists make much of writing fully developed characters. And there is an inventive layering of styles and stories over and alongside one another, for which the novel is uniquely placed.

The specificity of *Peuls* comes in this very bridging of genres. What fiction allows for is a manoeuvrability that weaves these elements together in a way that refashions the core of the narrative and also plays with time (in ways addressed later in this chapter). Monénembo recasts historical accounts and particular figures in a new light both by re-situating them in a new inter-textual context, but also as we have seen through intra-textual heterogeneity of genre and form. Justin Bisanswa describes African novelists ‘qui attirent l’Histoire à eux et la refaçonnerent en un discours décroché d’un discours plus officiel’.⁷⁶ There are two elements at work here which clarify Mudimbe’s sense: firstly the bringing near (the act of *reprendre* as taking up) and secondly the reshaping (*reprendre* as reinventing, rewriting). See below where Olivier de Sanderval embodies this same dual adoption-adaptation practice. What is most striking at this point, perhaps, is how this second element comes as fictional writing is inflected with the personality of the author.

Peuls is without doubt a historical endeavour, and yet as Coulibaly concludes, Monénembo does not seek to rival historical writing nor claim to provide a

⁷⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 263.

⁷⁵ Clifford, p. 47.

⁷⁶ Justin Bisanswa, *Roman africain contemporain: fictions sur la fiction de la modernité et du réalisme* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2009), p. 191.

comprehensive account.⁷⁷ Rather, he incorporates humour and fiction, and in *Roi* memory and testimony, to provide an alternative account which is consciously incomplete. Neither novel purports to contain a coherent narrative, and indeed elsewhere in his work Monénembo condemns naïve expectations of a history free from doubt and complexity. Addressing Africano in *Pelourinho*, who was murdered during a futile attempt to fill the gaps in his family's past, co-narrator Leda concludes, 'ton erreur fut ton optimisme excessif. Il ne sert à rien de prendre sa vie pour une recette de cuisine avec ce que cela comporte de choix, de cohérence, de programmation'.⁷⁸ To return to the singularity of the novel form, I cite the last epigraph of *Peuls* in full, which is taken from Zoé Oldenbourg:

La documentation étant à la portée du premier venu, l'écrivain est libre de s'en servir si cela lui plaît. Elle ne présente aucun intérêt en elle-même, elle ne vaut que par l'interprétation qu'on lui donne. Tout roman, si 'objectif' soit-il en apparence, est le portrait de son auteur, et n'obéit qu'aux lois de l'univers intérieur de l'écrivain (*Peuls*, 9).

Though too readily dismissive of other important factors, Oldenbourg helpfully extrapolates the author's relationship to other sources. And so we see that Monénembo not only refashions these historical narratives with his own personality, but that he consciously announces such moves. With the epigraphs he foreshadows the generic heterogeneity which follows through the text. They stand as an overt signal not only of subjectivity, but of intentional self-inscription: a break with any understanding of historiography or ethnography as objective. In refashioning these histories Monénembo exhibits the mobility and creativity celebrated in Braidotti's nomadic thought. Since the author is a dislocated subject himself, as a writer he is more ready to relocate (other subjects, stories) both

⁷⁷ Coulibaly, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, p. 20.

⁷⁸ *Pelourinho*, p. 197.

geographically and temporally.⁷⁹ In the 2000s Monénembo seeks to uproot older historical texts and relocate the colonial worlds depicted therein within his contemporary postcolonial milieux. He weaves multiple genres together in a single text, as we have seen, but also writes *Roi* as a second re-writing of *Peuls*. In a way the later text fills out and completes the earlier one, corroborating Clifford's description of modern ethnography needing to account for multiple perspectives and readings, and showing Monénembo's commitment to the endeavour by dedicating to it two published works.⁸⁰ In short, *Roi* is a re-writing of the third part of *Peuls*, and tells the imperial encounter with Fouta-Djallon from a new, individual viewpoint. We will come to the individual figure of Olivier de Sanderval shortly, when we read Monénembo's account as an enactment of his agenda to bring those on the margins into the centre. For now our attention will rest on these shifts of focalisation, which exemplify the author's endeavours to take up and refashion (*reprendre*) historical accounts.

Orality

As well as reworking genre, Monénembo's historical rewritings are original in the perspectives he provides. Focalisation and narrative voice evidence obvious subjectivity and productive distance. To return to the concept of *historicité faible*, Coulibaly emphasises that writing history is never a neutral act, that in making it their own, writers seek to 'inventorier les faits mais aussi de les valoriser et, à bien des égards, de les repenser'.⁸¹ For Coulibaly, Monénembo does this most obviously by inscribing his writing on *Peuls* with a critical distance. In *Roi*, he conjectures, Olivier de Sanderval depicts the *Peuls* through racist eyes from a scrutinising distance, and in *Peuls* the Serer cousin narrator remains at a derisive distance. Whereas for *Peuls* I agree, in the case of Olivier de Sanderval the narrative

⁷⁹ Pierre-Philippe Fraiture describes Valentin Yves Mudimbe in the same way, V. Y. Mudimbe: *Undisciplined Africanism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 47.

⁸⁰ Clifford, p. 52.

⁸¹ Coulibaly, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, p. 14.

ingenuity comes rather from a place of magnified proximity. Commenting on the novel's originality, Monénembo says that it 'was *written from inside Olivier de Sanderval*... This Merlin simply succeeded in casting his spell on me ... taking hold of my pen, and *writing this book in my place*'.⁸² There is a decrease in distance throughout Sanderval's adventures: as he moves inland through Fouta-Djallon, he draws closer in to Peul ways of being. Indeed, Sanderval comes so close to the Peuls he observes that he is transformed by them.

In Sanderval, Monénembo writes an imperial *Wandersmann* through the forests of Fouta-Djallon. The implications of Certeau's street-level focalisation, as I set out in the Introduction to this thesis, are twofold: narrative perspective is always mobile, and it reveals details which otherwise remain unseen. Both are in evidence when we read *Roi* through Sanderval's eyes. The frustrating derouting and rerouting which Sanderval experiences due to illness and opposition mirror the failed advancements of the Peul kingdom which recur countless times in *Peuls*.⁸³ Recalling that opening epigraph, '*il n'a pas la victoire, il n'est pas vaincu*' the non-linear and repetitive attempts at establishing territory indirectly reframe any over-simplified, glorious Eurocentric colonial narratives (which would seek to present a different picture) in the realities of life on the ground. Sanderval's personal encounters with Peul everyday characters and chiefs are all conveyed through a mind biased by racist preconceptions and naïve superiority. 'Il pouvait gagner la partie s'il jouait fin. Alors, il aurait un pays à lui: avec de l'or et des troupeaux, de la puissance et de la gloire' (*Roi*, 88). The narrative of these encounters is so consistently subjective that we read as much a depiction of the

⁸² Elliott, 'Amazon exclusive' (my emphasis).

⁸³ *Roi*, p. 121, 'Une terrible maladie le frappe, plus grave et plus insupportable encore que la colique ou l'insomnie, et qui n'avait même pas de nom. Une douleur indéfinie chauffa son corps, empoisonna son sang et troubla son esprit.' *Roi*, p. 114, 'Le Blanc, il dit ceci et l'instant d'après il dit cela! s'écria l'une d'entre elles. On devrait le décapiter!'.

Peuls of Fouta-Djallon as a character profile of Sanderval himself. I return to this below.

As for *Peuls*, the narrative viewpoint is highly original again, and helps to elucidate the culturally embedded nature of the text. Although the narrator is neither labelled nor introduced as a griot, his position as chief storyteller renders alignment with such a figure useful. Of interest here is the range of functions carried out by a griot in West African society – here I am indebted to Thomas Hale’s ‘The social functions of griots and griottes in the Sahel and savannah regions of West Africa’.⁸⁴ The griot in West African society is much more than a storyteller: as well as being the source of knowledge for a family’s genealogy and history, she or he can varyingly give advice, act as diplomat, mediator or interpreter, can teach, compose, perform as a musician or praise-singer, take part in sport and battle. The griot’s speech, often on behalf of one other or a group of others, thus ‘represents the nexus of an exchange of power between nobles and other members of society’.⁸⁵ In other words, the griot is a personally invested subject situated in a series of relations with other subjects. Awareness of this should heighten not only the importance the reader gives to the narrator’s storytelling, but also highlight that his narrative is far from neutral.

The specificity of this griot figure comes in the fact that he is a Serer, namely from a neighbouring tribe to the Peuls. A young Peul man has asked for the history of his people, and this ‘cousin’ obliges: the heterodiegetic narrative proceeds largely as a third person account of Peul history, but this is framed, and repeatedly reframed, by dialogic interruptions, within a second person address from the Serer to his audience of one, ‘*puisque tu insistes, mon petit chenapan...il convient que je*

⁸⁴ Thomas Hale, ‘The social functions of griots and griottes in the Sahel and savannah regions of West Africa’, in Boyd-Buggs, Debra and Joyce Hope Scott, eds. *Camel Tracks: Critical Perspectives on Sahelian Literatures* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press: 2003), pp. 73-88.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

t'en dise ce que je sais' (*Peuls*, 19). Irony and derision characterise this narrator's account of Peul social codes and historical trajectories. These elements are but some of those which always make the production of oral history a communal endeavour.⁸⁶ The relationship between narrator and addressee is that of *parent à plaisanteries*, a friendly relationship that combines kindness with antagonism. This *cousinage* is like a friendly rivalry, measured by known conventions, and worked out differently between different people groups.⁸⁷ Here it allows for a depiction (in line with the epigraphs) of Peuls as 'other', in as much as the narrator (though not the author) comes from a different ethnic group, and yet is simultaneously close, linked by the *cousinage* relationship. Far from objective in tone, the Serer mocks his Peul addressee (and the whole Peul community, see below) from a position of ironic proximity: their closeness allows him to reveal their flaws. Streaming Peul stories via this Serer voice avoids the exaggerated celebratory tone common to Afrocentrist discourse. At the same time, the narrator is but one vessel for transferring history, and in his biased account there is the understanding that the same stories will (and should) be told differently in a different context. Monénembo, as ever, denies the sufficiency of one single story.

Where the epigraphs begin, the rest of the narrative continues to unpick any notion of a glorious Peul past. Indeed Monénembo's *Peuls* is altogether more derisive than commendable of the exploits of Peul people. The critique and teasing which lace the narrative clearly contrast Cheikh Anta Diop's discourse on African heritage, history and success. Exhibiting the superficial hostility common to *cousinage* exchanges, the narrator delights in the failures and frustrations of the Peul tribe, such as when royal rivalries between Boubou Moussa and Bôkar Siré

⁸⁶ 'The notions of status, role, career, goal, social arena, and group of reference all make clear that a person is placed in relation to others within a community.' Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 108.

⁸⁷ Cécile Canut and Étienne Smith, 'Pactes, alliances et plaisanteries: Pratiques locales, discours global', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 46: 184 (2006), 687-754 (p. 694).

leave the land ravaged and like ‘une mangue coupée en deux’ (*Peuls*, 248). Where Diop – at least in his *Nations, nègres et cultures* – presumes oneness (Egypt and ‘le monde noir [sont] une seule et même chose’) and creates a bright yet vague picture of African unity and cohesion,⁸⁸ Monénembo goes into details which disallow such a rosy picture to be maintained. In reading again and again not only of inter- and intra-tribal discord and conflict but of seemingly preventable violence on the part of Peul rulers, the reader is unable to see them as the ideal shapers of society they are held up to be by the likes of Diop.⁸⁹ Their siege of the Mandingues at Kansala is but one example of fatal conflict they incite. Dianké Wâli and his griot are the ones to curse them in this instance: ‘ces ridicules cynocéphales de Peuls qui se blottissent de peur derrière leurs bêtes à cornes... Le Peul est un misérable insecte: pieds grêles, torse de guêpe...’ (*Peuls*, 428). Structurally, Monénembo’s account stresses repeated patterns of failure across generations, brought about by arrogance and lack of foresight; the author continues his critical re-casting of African subjects here. As we will see again in Chapter Three, Monénembo’s depiction of African subjects is far from idealised, and highlights shortcomings to interrogate questions of guilt and responsibility.

Rather than maintain a romanticised idealism concerning African cultural heritage, Monénembo provides a narrative which puts inherent contradictions and tensions on show. He also emphasises the everyday comings and goings so that the description of Peuls is grounded in small stories rather than blown up into history-shaping exploits. One instance of a small fight with some Dialonké children is a typical example: a gang of Peul boys ambush some Dialonké youths with stones, chasing them away only to be forced into flight themselves by the threatened backlash (*Peuls*, 230-1). Although both sides are in the wrong, the Serer clearly

⁸⁸ Diop, p. 124.

⁸⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *L’Unité culturelle de l’Afrique noire: domaines du patriarcat et du matriarcat dans l’Antiquité classique* (Paris; Dakar: Présence africaine, 2008), for example p. 185 where Africans are described as more peaceful than Europeans.

attributes blame to the Peuls, whom he derides as ‘singés malingres et rouges...race d’incorrigibles canailles!’ (230). This is in line with the depiction of them which permeates the text, characterised by derogatory epithets such as ‘horde de chiots bruyants’, and ‘renards machiavéliques et rusés’ (321, 444).

All this comes in a markedly conversational narrative, which in its oral nature allows for the inclusion of proverbs, anecdotes and songs alongside longer stories. The main flow of narrative spanning centuries, for example, is frequently interrupted with dialogue as the narrator speaks directly to his addressee. This is sometimes to introduce another aspect of the story: ‘T’a-t-on déjà parlé de Tierno Souleymane Baal?’ (*Peuls*, 291), and elsewhere expressly to insult him, ‘*espèce de pleure-misère*’ (19) and his tribe as a whole, ‘Tu sais à quel point vous êtes susceptibles et emportés, jaloux l’un de l’autre et emplis d’orgueil!’ (246). In line with the rules of the *parenté à plaisanteries*, ‘un narrateur de ce type se doit d’accabler de toutes sortes de traits satiriques, d’insultes, de grossièretés, celui à qui il s’adresse’.⁹⁰ Besides the humorous mockery, their conversation seems largely to resituate the young Peul addressee within the historical narrative of his people, immediately making the past relevant for his present, and connecting the young man to his ancestors. This is indicated by the Serer’s dual use of pronouns ‘tu’ and ‘vous’: the singular emphasising their proximity and familiarity and the plural referencing the collective community, albeit one from which the narrator insists on being separate.⁹¹ This varied pronoun address is a further instance of the narrator’s ambivalent position: as cousin and critic he both announces the heroism and denounces the greed of the Peuls. The fluidity and heterogeneity allowed for by the oral style of narrative is well suited to such fluctuating historiography.

⁹⁰ Mouralis, in *Littérature peule*, ed. Baumgardt, p. 44.

⁹¹ Renombo, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, p 40.

Clifford alludes to the potentially non-dialogic nature of published ethnographies, where the face-to-face encounters of ethnographic fieldwork are largely invisible.⁹² The fictionalised encounters in *Peuls* and *Roi* conversely keep this aspect very much alive in the text. Indeed both novels are strewn with dialogue, about the political as much as the personal. So for example Sanderval negotiates trains and trade with the *almâmi* (*Roi*, 95-6) as well as asking Dion-Koïn for his princess wife, Dalanda (119). Again we see the centrality of the everyday, and that ‘Monénembo se refuse à voir dans les Peuls un peuple appelé par la providence à un quelconque destin exceptionnel’.⁹³ Importantly in these dialogues there is often scope for fluctuation and changed meanings. For example, Mâly, the interpreter, often transmits the opposite of what Sanderval says so as to mute his ignorant offence and preserve his life (94). Such ambiguity and fluidity in spoken dialogue, for which there is less room in the fixity of written text, aptly convey the history of the Peul people, known as they are for volatility and ruse:

Ces gens sont insaisissables aussi bien par la main que par l’esprit! On dirait qu’ils ont tous lu Montaigne ici. Vous ne verrez jamais peuple aussi ondoyant: jamais à la même place, jamais la même parole... Ici, tromper l’autre n’est pas considéré comme un défaut, mais comme une prouesse qui forge votre renommée (*Roi*, 211).

The performative, fictionalised, and communal nature of dialogue so relevant here is developed in Chapter Three; for now we note that there is clearly room for the same plot to have multiple expressions (as in these two texts) and also that creative invention has its place as much in dialogue as in other *débrouillard* practices.⁹⁴ It should become clear in this thesis that linguistic and narrative innovation is one

⁹² Clifford, p. 41.

⁹³ Mouralis, in *Littérature peule*, ed. Baumgardt, p.48.

⁹⁴ Time does not allow here but Chapter Four addresses the significance of Monénembo including other languages alongside French, as he does in *Peuls*.

recurring expression of the nomadic subjectivity Monénembo transcribes. Of course the power inherent in the speaking subject is a prevalent theme in postcolonial literature, and in this case the narrator embodies the capacity for modifying and retelling any story.

Nomadism

The fluidity of oral literature also lends itself to one of the primary themes of *Peuls* and *Roi*: movement. This is a feature of Monénembo's texts from the first to the last, and where in Chapter Two I examine the effects of dictatorship on space and movement within a city, in the last chapter of the thesis I consider movement's role in representing memory and narrative in exile.

In the eyes of the Serer narrator, and more widely, Peuls are known for their movement and deviousness. Their history is described in *Peuls* as intractable, since they are forever on the move. In the novel's prologue the narrator bemoans the task before him:

Ton itinéraire? Un horrible brouillamini. Ta vie ? Rien qu'un sac de nœuds. J'ai beau me creuser la tête, je ne vois pas par où commencer. Sa-saye, vagabond! Ligoter un courant d'air serait plus aisé que de raconter ton histoire. Tu erres depuis l'époque d'Horus, sans bagages, sans repères, sans autre boussole que le sabot qui piétine sous tes yeux. Tu campes et décampes au rythme des saisons, au gré de tes délires, comme si une bestiole te rongait la cervelle, comme si tu avais le feu au cul (16).

In Deleuzian terms, the Serer is deterritorialised, thrown by his encounter with the nomad, the one who is seemingly out of reach. Braidotti describes this in a discussion of the politics of location, where consciousness-raising comes from the intervention of others: 'it estranges us from the familiar, the intimate, the known

and casts an external light upon it'.⁹⁵ Yet the details of the narrative simultaneously reveal a long-developed knowledge of the Peuls too. Through Monénembo's staged encounter between Serer griot and nomadic herdsmen we view the ambivalence of difference, and this is emphasised by the vast spaces covered in the novel. The narrative perspective draws varying close to and far from the action being described. At times, the reader is led into the heart of a family (following one individual initially, in typical Monénembo attention to single figures) and other times drawn back to see whole kingdoms. These close and far movements happen again and again, and the variation in proximity is made possible by the narrator's griot-like quasi omniscience coupled with the familiarity of the *cousinage* relationship. Through such combinations of magnified and distanced perspective, the impression is of reading a comprehensive history which is at once personalised and wide-reaching. Indeed, the temporal span encompassed in *Peuls* covers five centuries. Such a long history can only be re-told in relatively few pages because of the narrative style, varying the pace of storytelling so that hundreds of years pass in just a few sentences (42) whilst the reader still feels engaged through detailed, slow-moving passages which dialogues often explain broader plot development (310-12). These respective elisions and amplifications recall Certeau's attention to asyndeton and synecdoche as perambulatory figures, by which Monénembo shapes literary space.⁹⁶ Synecdoche concentrates, it enlarges and expands (the narrator zooming in); asyndeton cuts, elides and fragments (the narrator skipping over), and these figures create 'a spatial sentencing'.⁹⁷ Thus the tale's orality, its immediate speech-likeness, symbolises the practices and movements of its nomad characters.

⁹⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 16.

⁹⁶ Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in Graham Ward, ed. *The Certeau Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) pp. 101-118, (p. 109).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

A vast geographical space is traversed in this narrative also. The almami cover the whole of West Africa and action moves from the Atlantic coast as far as Mecca and Jerusalem (357). With his travelling story, moving in perspective as well as content, Monénembo is persistently inscribing Peul nomadic movement into this novel, narrating processes of becoming which are both relational and situated. Despite the repetitions and episodes where Peul troops have to surrender land and withdraw, the structure of the book lends itself to a clear sense of forward movement (each chapter is headed with dates which give a timeframe for the action therein). These vicissitudes colour the account of territorialisations with a historical precision which is absent from, for example, Diop's more general *Nations, nègres et cultures*, and this is all imbued, of course, with the narrator's delight in such frustrating setbacks for the Peuls. Monénembo's narratives render these historic figures fuller bodied, determinedly situated, and ever engaging in practices of territorialisation.

These texts certainly express a freer and less controlled kind of movement than in some of Monénembo's other texts. In Chapter Two I will demonstrate to what extent movement is prohibited by the heavy hands of dictatorship. Of course the theme of movement is not limited to physical displacement: mobility and territorialising occur in language and thought as well. Walking is Certeau's starting point, and equally here it is but one example of what is explored conceptually throughout this thesis. The value of beginning with the physical trajectories of Peul rulers and imperial explorers, as well as providing relevant historical context for the rest of Monénembo's writing, is to signal the key themes of the author's writing project. In attending first to *Peuls* and *Roi*, our awareness of language, movement, and subjectivity is raised before examining the same themes in Monénembo's other works. Spatiality is represented as ongoing processes of deterritorialization which, far from being abstract, are always both relational and

situated. Braidotti emphasises the relevance of Deleuzian thinking about space in terms of thought and subjectivity, and Certeau and these histories of actual physical movement provide the locatedness which Noyes argues is missing from nomadological theories. We have a kind of middle ground between pure ethnography and nomadology: actual movements in a nomads' land which, fictionalised, point to the subject- and space-shaping trajectories to come. So for example, where in *Peuls* we see the almami physically territorialising increasing areas of West Africa, in *Les Crapauds-brousse* the political territorialising (of one city, a synecdoche of the nation) happens through the intimidation tactics of a hidden dictator figure. Monénembo creates literary personae who exemplify Braidotti's figurations.⁹⁸

Though free and meandering, there is equally nothing romanticised about the movement in *Peuls* and *Roi*. In particular, the close up portrait we read of Olivier de Sanderval shatters any notion of imperial officer as carefree voyager free from harm. His movements are time and again thwarted by illness and opposition. *Roi* is a *récit de voyage repris* by Monénembo. He shifts the focus from glorious exploits to the everyday tales of Paris and Fouta. Our interest here, in light of Monénembo's project to examine African subjectivity up close and personal, and Braidotti's thoughts on becoming-subjects, is to read Sanderval as a subject shaped by his encounters with the Peuls. We read *Roi* then as a double *reprendre*: a re-casting of Oliver de Sanderval as a figure in French historiography, and a re-writing of the conquest of Fouta-Djallon in *Peuls*. In it, Monénembo takes issue with the inadequacies of prior inventions of the African subject, seeking to re-cast them in a series of staged encounters.

We have seen so far that Monénembo is original in the tradition of writing Peuls. Though similar to Hampâté Bâ in his bridging of history and literature, he moves

⁹⁸ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 12 and see earlier in this chapter.

back and forth between genres, writing in a kind of imitation of those movements he describes. Overtly centralising his texts on history, Monénembo has not been drawn into a debate on African origins. Rather, following Peul movements, he retains a focus on the everyday which is characteristic of his work: as I show later in Chapter Three, even in his literary response to the genocide in Rwanda, the focus remains on one individual's daily life, rather than the events which caught the attention of the world. He reinscribes historical narratives with orality and nomadism, reformulating them as distinctly personalised, and characterised by mobility. In this vein, individuals matter, and Monénembo takes care to present full-bodied portraits of main characters. In *Roi*, his double *reprendre*, he casts light on its subjects as marginal, complex, and evolving figures; and this comes in part by interrogating his own previous narrative of Sanderval.

Recasting past figures

In *Peuls*, Monénembo describes Sanderval as an 'ignoble aventurier' (442); this is in line with the French colonial administration's maligning image of him and Monénembo only later critically reassesses this. Following encouragement from his former headmaster, he sets out to investigate Sanderval's life and to take up and reformulate his own earlier misrepresentation. Together with Olivier's grandson Bruno de Sanderval, whom he met by chance, Monénembo aims to 'faire entrer dans l'histoire une histoire qui n'a pas d'historiographie, sinon peut-être une historiographie de la marge'.⁹⁹ Just as in his next novel *Le Terroriste noir* with the figure of Addi Bâ, via more nuanced portrayals he renders such figures heroes of French and African history, lest they be mis-remembered. In so doing, the author

⁹⁹ Coulibaly, in *Tierno Monénembo et le roman*, ed. De Meyer and Diop, p. 16.

presents a challenge to pre-established notions of historicisation, re-situating these figures alongside those more widely recognised.

This is not the same as the personal retrospectives I will examine in Chapter Four which are conditioned more explicitly by exile and collective memories. It is a repositioning from the margins of a figure neglected by history so that Sanderval is re-painted as a legend of his time. Monénembo describes Sanderval as a figure who captivated him, and he admires ‘his intelligence, his splendid sense of pride and solitude, his insatiable curiosity, his courage at the edge of despair, his perpetual dissatisfaction, and his obsessive desire to be unlike anyone of his time’.¹⁰⁰ It is this personality which he takes from the family’s written and oral archives, and brings to life in his novel. *Roi*, then, is an enactment of Monénembo’s agenda to write a *historicité faible*, retelling a wider history via the story of one figure he takes up. Olivier de Sanderval’s independent trajectory positioned him notably on the margins of French colonial history, and his personal and inner life lends him easily to a literary text. What is more, with *Roi* Monénembo completes not only *Peuls*, but also Sanderval’s own travel account, which he describes as follows:

J’aurais peut-être pu donner à mon livre une forme plus attrayante en développant et en dramatisant certains épisodes et en ajoutant à l’ensemble mille détails dont je n’ai gardé note que dans ma mémoire; j’ai mieux aimé lui laisser son caractère prime-sautier, qui m’a paru être pour le lecteur comme une garantie de véracité (Avant-propos, *Carnet*, x).

Monénembo’s aims are not limited to the same bid for veracity, and reformulate this text adding what Sanderval omits. The truth-fiction interface is thus blurred in

¹⁰⁰ Elliott, ‘Amazon exclusive’.

the creation of biography. What is more, the author overlays his portrayal of Sanderval with a critique of France's colonial endeavours.

Man of his time

The profile of Sanderval he presents is comprehensive: he is undoubtedly a man of his time, and evidences a strong colonial mindset. In this way the portrait is far from complimentary. Like other protagonists in Monénembo's fiction, Sanderval is not idealised but grounded in his context and influenced by it. Notes in his *Carnet* foreshadow the *mission civilisatrice* and *mise en valeur* which were to follow, and mark out his assumed Eurocentric superiority. So he writes of Foutah-Djallon: 'Là est la vraie route par laquelle la civilisation pénètre dans l'intérieur du grand continent sous ces latitudes, parce que là est le climat favorable où les Européens peuvent vivre et créer un centre d'influences permanent et fort' (Avant-propos, *Carnet*, ii). His ideal is to establish infrastructure and education for the whole continent, so that 'L'Afrique serait alors le centre du monde, le cœur de la civilisation, la nouvelle Thèbes, la nouvelle Athènes, la nouvelle Rome et la nouvelle Florence tout à la fois' (*Roi*, 85). Embodying Eurocentric imperial values, he appears ignorant of Africa's existent wealth, history, and civilisation. Equally, he holds racist assumptions which condition his expectations and encounters. Above all Sanderval strikes us, in his blind determination, as both self-important and naïve. He is motivated by prestige and self-glorification, and intends to colonise the region 'pour devenir roi' (16). Monénembo repeatedly uses free indirect discourse to convey what Sanderval elsewhere asserts in the first person: 'il serait le souverain des sauvages...Il en ferait un royaume, vivant sous ses idées et sa loi et rayonnant sous le génie de la France' (19). Again and again when he is affronted by hostility and fatal illness, it is recalling this aim which renews his vigour, 'le pays des Peuls devait devenir français' (262).

Knowledge seeker

In spite of this problematic ambition, the portrait of Sanderval is largely admirable.

He is likeable as a character, and Monénembo's character profile early on is fleshed out through his later trials. 'Très tôt, il se montra intelligent, énergique, fort débrouillard' (45). This latter characteristic will only develop upon encountering the Peuls. He is a 'doux rêveur' (Ibid.) who pursues his dreams, falls in love along the way, and goes to all ends to found his Peul kingdom (136, 115). Ultimately he wants to see peace in the internal rivalries between different kingdoms of the Fouta empire.

What is more, we sympathise with him, and much more so than with any of the countless characters in *Peuls*. The magnified and personalised perspective of this reworked *récit de voyage* reveals the vicissitudes which thwart his progress.

Sanderval's journey is in no way a straightforward venture like the one he hopes for when he sets out in 1879. Far from it, the trajectory written in *Roi* takes him from Lyon to Dakar, then on to Dinguiraye, via Missidé-Dindéra and Dindéyah before eventually reaching Kahel, only to be sent away and have his whole route redirected. It is a stop-start journey marked with setbacks and obstacles, and he is struck by malaria, deprived of food, and left alone for days at a time (91). He loses his good friend Souvignet to tapeworm and yellow fever (147): just one example of the loneliness he experiences throughout his journey. These trials distance his account from more sentimental narratives of travel described by Mary Louise Pratt.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 74.

What is more, he is isolated by his compatriots. A lone figure, he is excluded from decisions and largely has to proceed without their support. Those in West Africa dissuade his endeavours, like Captain Dehous in Boké who derides his plans and offers no help: ‘Vous devez savoir que nous ne vous serons d’aucun secours s’il vous y arrivait quelque chose. On ne va pas au Fouta-Djalou comme on se promène en Auvergne’ (42). Monénembo writes thus to evoke our sympathy and we are left with a far more favourable impression of Sanderval than suggested by the derogatory epithet in *Peuls*. Those in France remain in their Parisian colonial offices, representative of those who would later make decisions at the Berlin conference (removed, at a distance, without walking the ground they were to distribute). Near the end of the novel, the narrator observes that ‘un courant colonialiste émergea du subconscient collectif de la France’ (250), growing amongst those with no personal experience of the African continent. In this divergence, Monénembo continues his appeal for ways of being which are grounded and contextualised, defined in terms of spatiality rather than an essentialist understanding of subjectivity. Within the historical colonial narrative of *Le Roi de Kahel* we read a modern biography of a pre-colonial figure relevant for post-colonial France and Africa today. In contrast to his compatriots Sanderval approaches the Peul people *autrement*: he makes sustained effort, against the odds, to understand those he meets. In time his ignorance gives way to deep understanding. In fact, Monénembo sees him as representative of a different, earlier kind of contact based on knowledge and mutual respect: a forgotten pioneer who aimed to bring “civilisation” to Africa, in order to enable Africans to combat difficulties and develop their land with ‘des institutions, certes, mais surtout des routes, des édifices, des industries, des chemins de fer’ (251).

Although nomadic theory does not presume actual physical movement, the two are mutually informative, and so I return to Braidotti in this discussion of Sanderval to

demonstrate how nomadic subjects can act as roadsigns for our understanding of ways of being. As Braidotti explains, ‘the point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify lines of flight, that is to say, a creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner distinction, but within all these categories’.¹⁰² It helps us look at spatializing practices that transcend or problematize standing divisions. In light of this, it is helpful to read Sanderval as a becoming-subject who dwells within categories of mobile, immobile, resident and foreigner. Quite literally, he proceeds then is held up, and more importantly, his becoming-Peul is observed by those around him and overtly described: he is varyingly ‘Blanc’, ‘hôte’, and ultimately ‘un Peul’ (*Roi*, 217). From *Peuls*, via his *Carnet*, to *Le Roi de Kahel*, he is a subject transformed by Monénembo’s re-writing. But in *Le Roi de Kahel* itself, he undergoes a truly located, grounded evolution. What Sanderval does not anticipate, but is certainly quick to pursue, is his own transformation. In seeking to understand and educate the Peuls he meets and works alongside, he himself is transformed and becomes Peul.

Becoming Peul

In direct contradiction with the earlier dismissal from Captain Dehous, Sanderval finds himself at home in Fouta: ‘Il marchait avec la même allégresse que s’il se trouvait sur les volcans d’Auvergne ou sur les hauts plateaux du Jura’ (*Roi*, 190). Recalling the generic *mélange* of *Peuls*, an interesting parallel can be made at this point with Clifford’s *The Predicament of Culture*. Clifford references Marcel Griaule, who spent decades living as an ethnographer among the Dogon people in Sanga (near Mopti in Mali), to exemplify a move towards recognising the

¹⁰² Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 7.

intercultural production of knowledge. Not only does ‘the accumulated experience of cooperative work over decades produce at least the effect of a deepening knowledge’ but Griaule speaks of himself as a student changed by what he learns. This illustrates a curve in wider ethnographic study which concluded that it ‘must be seen as a historically contingent, unruly dialogical encounter involving to some degree both conflict and collaboration in the production of texts’.¹⁰³ For the fictionalised Sanderval, there is a similar outsider turned insider development. His conscious vocalisation of this process only draws it more attention: ‘J’en ai par-dessus la tête d’être l’étranger des Peuls. J’ai envie d’en devenir un’ (*Roi*, 191). We see Sanderval gradually becoming Peul, in the way he adopts tactics and practices he has observed. To take one example, when en route to Dinguiraye he encounters a threatening Alpha Yaya accompanied by a thousand armed men, Sanderval is only spared because he attends to Peul custom and superstition and finds favour with the prince: ‘Ils burent le lait de l’amitié en parlant comme s’ils s’étaient toujours connus’ (72). He develops his tactics of negotiation by imitating Peul language (215) and obtains permission to advance by negotiating in Peul terms: ‘Il avait compris que la rouerie, chez eux, passait pour un noble sport. Vivre, c’était avant tout se gruger les uns les autres’ (88). Here we see again the important interplay of language, movement, and subjectivity as in a striking reversal of the straightforward colonisation anticipated by Sanderval; not only are there forwards and backwards movements geographically, but between subjects too, in an ongoing process of becoming where he shifts to act like those around him. This diminishing distance between subjects is presented by the author not as threatening (how proponents of European superiority might view it) but as ludic and productive.

These mutually conditioned moves are situated by Monénembo in the metaphor of a chess game. Superseding that of a colonial map designed from a removed

¹⁰³ Clifford, pp. 83, 90.

position across the Atlantic, this image conveys at once the interactive nature and the negotiations which dominate Sanderval's ongoing encounters with Peuls. The protagonist is repeatedly described as playing chess, with or without a companion, and with varying degrees of success (*Roi*, 87-8). In this metaphor for negotiation of space and knowledge, Monénembo hints at the complexity of different roles involved by multiple characters, and at the cunning and strategy required. The indirect, long-winded movement along Sanderval's journey is aptly contained in the image of the chess game, and this is paired with a shift in ways of being. The concentration required in a chess game also highlights via the repeated use of this metaphor those elements of conscious reflection which are locatable not only in Sanderval's evolving identity but also in nomadic *débrouillard* tactics across Monénembo's oeuvre. The kind of double figure Sanderval represents, conditioned by the different spaces he inhabits, is arguably familiar ground for Monénembo as an author, whose own ambivalent identity has been complexified by being relocated in multiple contexts.

Significantly, the most prominent aspect of Peul character in this novel, as in *Peuls*, is the ability to manipulate others with ruse and trickery. In a kind of act of *reprendre*, Sanderval takes up this Peul practice and implements it for his own gain: 'il avait eu le temps d'ouvrir les yeux et de voir un peu à travers les masques innombrables des Peuls. Il avait saisi leur art tout florentin de la conjuration et de l'esquive' (*Roi*, 88). Similar characteristics of ruse and quick-wittedness, I argue, are common to nomadic subjectivities across the board, and will be observed throughout the chapters of this thesis. As a direct result of careful observation, Sanderval is more knowledgeable, and soon more Peul. Again this comes in deliberately stark contrast to his fellow Frenchmen who are held up as ignorant and incompetent. This description of one of them is representative: 'L'Afrique, il savait

à peine par où ça se trouvait et les colonies, il les imaginait à peine plus compliquées que la Camargue avec des singes à la place des chevaux' (246).

Though Sanderval's account consists predominantly of action and dialogue, he often retreats to observe and, famously, to take notes in his *Carnet (Roi, 118, 136, 140)*. This exemplifies what Pierre-Philippe Fraiture concludes of Mudimbe's term, that '*reprendre* is thus a notion that captures the crossovers between reading, writing, and living'.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the *Carnet* aptly contains both the physical and the conceptual practices of reading and writing which constitute Sanderval's conscious adoption and adaption of 'being Peul'. In drawing close to observe, he is sufficiently near to take up Peul ways of being, and simultaneously he is creative and independent enough to modify them (see the dual sense of *reprendre* defined earlier in this chapter). The *Carnet* is one of the first stages in Monénembo's Peul series of rewriting, forming the basis for *Le Roi de Kahel*, his *récit de voyage refaçoné*. It helpfully recalls the literature review which opened this chapter, reminding us of the diversity of genre which Monénembo incorporates into this refashioned Peul historiography.

Conclusion: Past-Present

The primary aim, as I have noted, with *Peuls* and *Le Roi de Kahel*, seems to be to reposition marginalised historical narratives by rewriting them in a more personalised form. By emphasising evolving subjectivity, mobility, and oral language, Monénembo renders the past extraordinarily present. This comes in large part by giving more weight to space than to time.¹⁰⁵ As we have seen, Monénembo does not promote the same narrative of origins as his Afrocentrist forebears.

¹⁰⁴ Fraiture, p. 186.

¹⁰⁵ Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*, p. 228.

Rather, there is a bid to re-present the past, drawing it in to the present to shed new light, as we have seen, on broad Peul history, and on the figure of Oliver de Sanderval. This is true even in the genealogical content of *Peuls* which, though it traces multiple generations of the Peul empire, rests most heavily on those synchronic episodes of people's interaction with space. Indeed the imperial focus of *Le Roi de Kahel* results in the same: whilst we read the chronological progression of Sanderval's life, attention rests more on his lateral movements, his social interactions and relationships. It is of course this dramatized personal focus which also renders the texts more enjoyable as historical novels. In Chapter Four we will see a different mode of writing biographies and making the past present when, relying on memory, characters reconstruct history through first-person recollective storytelling. In the case of the two texts examined here though it is through close attention to historical detail, a nomadic rendering of becoming-subjects, and a reworking of genre that Monénembo chooses to *reprendre* Peul histories. Conscious attention within the texts to the problems of historiography (the Serer bemoaning his difficult task, Sanderval writing in his *Carnet*) further awakens the reader to Monénembo's own endeavour, as well as to the wider need to pay careful attention to what and whom is recorded in historical texts, and how. His commitment to *reprendre* what has been written before (including his own words) takes issue with previous inventions of Africa.

So what effect does this have on the present, and why in the 2000s does Monénembo choose to centralise history in his fiction? Certainly by excavating the past there is an interrogation of the present, and, as he does elsewhere, Monénembo poses questions about space and narrative which are relevant in many contexts today. Similarly, as past figures are de-glorified and/or recast and grounded, there is greater understanding both of them and also of those who dominate the present day, since a different lens is available through which to view French and African

subjects. Also it may be that there are links to be made between France's colonial endeavours and the post-independence *déroulement* in its former colonies. The author certainly goes to great lengths in these texts to shift Peul people from the marginalised position they were forced into by Touré's discrimination. Could it be that Monénembo is pinpointing some early roots of the trouble which would grip Guinea in the twentieth century? The contrast in representation shown in the next chapter would suggest not, but the murmurs of tribal warfare and imperial domination are nonetheless there.

Above all, the focus on movement enabled by this located present-ness underlines that narrative and subjectivity are always evolving, and indeed that those processes are mutually conditioned. That is, narratives are highly subjective (as we have seen with the Serer's take on Peul history) and subjectivities are both formed and expressed through narrative. Both of these are persistently shown in Monénembo's writing, as will be evidenced in the case of Samba in *Les Écailles du ciel*, amongst others. Our lasting impression of Peuls and Sanderval is of those who are repeatedly displaced yet creative and devious: they are representative of the *débrouillardise* Monénembo writes into all his protagonists. The literal crossing of space depicted in these novels renders these traits obvious, but the same kinds of ways of being will be observed across Monénembo's work as he continues to emphasise mobile subjects.

Chapter Two: Contesting space around dictatorship

***Les Crapauds-brousse* (1979) and *Les Écailles du Ciel* (1986)**

Introduction

We turn now to address Monénembo's first two works, his dictatorship novels *Les Crapauds-brousse* and *Les Écailles du Ciel*. In the last chapter, movement was a running thread to my analysis, and the same will be true here. The author's focus moves from Peul to other nomad subjects and the various (parallel) ways they inhabit space. He decries the precariousness of newly independent contexts in these novels, emphasising violence in particular. The importance awarded to language in the first chapter will also be developed here, as the strategic use of public and hidden transcripts is revealed.

In these fierce critiques of postcolonial politics, one might expect a critique by Monénembo which sees the roots of dictatorship in the structures of domination in place within colonialism which was, according to Neil Lazarus, a kind of dictatorship in itself.¹ The parallels in the exertion of autocratic rule present in the two works studied in the previous chapter and those under analysis here might lead us rather to deduce that there were existent conditions and models for dictatorship even before the colonial era. The author's primary concern is not to lay blame upon Guinea's colonial heritage – culpable and inextricable though it is – but instead to unpick the strategies at play in the performances and practices of domination and resistance which are not limited to that era: a characteristically Monénembo focus on space not time. Achille Mbembe highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the complex factors which condition territorialisation in the present, not neglecting the influences of colonialism but not drawing connections

¹ Neil Lazarus, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

which are too simple either.² Conflicts around control of gold and diamond mines and oil fields, localised clashes, as well as the multiple influences of globalisation mean territories are no longer necessarily defined according to official limits and norms. He lists contexts in sub-Saharan Africa where spatial dynamics are overwhelmingly itinerant and nomadic and lead to a continuous contesting of borders, forcing us to think, beyond the nation, of an ever-nascent geography.

Thus the progression from the previous chapter to this is less about inherited patterns of control and more about parallels in defining space. Where Monénembo re-scribes history to define a new place for Peuls in Francophone writing, in this chapter it is political and physical, rather than historiographical, space which is re-defined. In the novels addressed here, Monénembo gives evidence of a common imaginary that leads nomad subjects to engage in *débrouillard* modes of resistance. As Mbembe writes, ‘other ways of imagining space and territory are developing’³, and Monénembo puts these on show by revealing often hidden power dynamics. This forms a significant contribution to the author’s project to re-cast African subjects as empowered agents rather than victims.

This chapter will address domination then resistance, but they are not ordered thus to suggest the former has primacy. Quite the contrary, I aim to show how cyclical and interrelated different expressions of power are, and by deduction, that those localised chains of violence reflect the broader scale causal cycles of domination and resistance. Where Mbembe’s pessimism in *On the Postcolony* effectively highlights the brutality and hardship of the postcolonial space, it downplays the potential for productive resistance.⁴ We need a model which accounts for the complexity and dynamic practices of both resistance and dominance. Cultural

² Achille Mbembe, ‘At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa’, *Public Culture* 12 (2000), 259–84, p. 265.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 108.

patterns of domination and subordination must be understood via a dialectic of disguise and surveillance, and we will see in this chapter that both parties perform wearing masks (one of unitary control, one of submissive consent) and both are working on discerning the true state of things (one of schemes of revolt, and one of cracks in the authority).⁵ Dictatorship and resistance, like the other subjects depicted in Monénembo's work, are mutually constituted in dialogic relationship to one another. I will address them each in turn here, but aim to establish the interdependence of these two sets of power practices.

Monénembo's postcolonial project seeks to recast the African subject beyond disempowering victim narratives. In the previous chapter this was shown in re-writing about Peul history and imperialism. Peul characters were shown to be wily subjects enacting agency, and also the model for *débrouillard* ways of being adopted by Oliver de Sanderval. In this chapter we turn to subjects acting within spaces of dictatorship. Monénembo's first two novels, *Les Crapauds-brousse* (1979) and *Les Écailles du ciel* (1986) explicitly address dictatorship.

These two novels are the author's most direct indictment of Sékou Touré's reign in post-Independence Guinea, written while the leader was still in power.⁶ In *Crapauds*, a despotic regime gradually takes over physically and ideologically. Set in post-colonial Guinea (though not named as such),⁷ the novel deals with the immediate aftermath of independence, and puts across some degree of the suffering experienced in that period of Sékou Touré's rule.⁸ Dust and darkness seep

⁵ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 3.

⁶ *Les Écailles du ciel* was written in 1980 and 1981, and only published after Touré's death (1984).

⁷ Unlike *Les Écailles du ciel*, *Les Crapauds-brousse* does not explicitly name Guinea, Conakry, or Touré within the text. However, the figure of Sâ Matrak undeniably points to Touré, and the setting of the novel's action is intended to reflect post-independence Guinea.

⁸ Sékou Touré (born 1922) was president of Guinea at independence and until 1984, during (several years of) which time he led a regime of violence and corruption. Lansiné Kaba,

progressively over the city as the effects of brutal dictatorship are felt. Protagonist Diouldé's tranquil existence is interrupted as government colleagues entangle him in their web of corrupt activity. They work under the unseen hand of the president Sâ Matrak, abusing their victims and removing countless numbers from sight for the slightest 'infringement'. Where *Les Écailles* is more symbolic in its narrative, the prevailing atmosphere is the same. Protagonist Samba is driven out of his village, and on a kind of aimless quest, ends up working in the capital city, then imprisoned, later caught up in the Independence movement and imprisoned once again. Remaining mute throughout the novel, his silence conveys a definitive sense of helplessness, which is repeatedly emphasised by the meandering path along which he is propelled, and ends in a death without legacy. The recurring dictator figure in this novel is named Ndourou-Wembêdo, and is represented, as in the first novel, with a blend of horror, hyperbole, and humour. The same themes are evident in both novels: misery and corruption reign, threats of violence condition the atmosphere and what is hidden vies against what is put on show. This tension feeds a prevailing sense of instability.

Backdrop of instability

It is this instability which forms the backdrop to the action of both these novels, and warrants positioning them in Patrice Nganang's category of *roman de la dictature*. These novels address the violence of past and present Africa, and pinpoint dictatorship in the postcolony as the clearest embodiment of the continent's experience of tragedy.⁹ In the same vein as Monénembo, Nganang equates the period directly after independence with dictatorship.¹⁰ This is a

From Colonialism to Autocracy: Guinea under Touré, 1957-1984 (Harare: The author, 1985).

⁹ Nganang, *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine* (Paris: Homnisphères, 2007), p. 200.

¹⁰ Monénembo, 'La Guinée, cinquante ans d'indépendance et d'enfer', *Le Monde*, 4 October 2009.

foundational element of the writing, and cannot be ignored.¹¹ After Mbembe, Nganang largely defines these novels as depicting the malign: they lay bare the full extent of the tragedy and oppression of dictatorships which leave little room for opposition.¹² Alongside Monénembo, other novelists examined in this category are Ahmadou Kourouma (*En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*), Yambo Ouloguem, (*Le Devoir de violence*) and Sony Labou Tansi (*La Vie et demie*). For Nganang, these novels display similar trends: violence is inevitable and epidemic, not only in the state but emerging in individuals; the focus is less on the passing of time than on the contest for life and death; and satire is rife as authors ridicule the myths and madness they critique.¹³ By denouncing tyranny in these dictatorship novels, the authors' demystifying aim (revealing oppression and corruption) acts in contrapuntal purpose to the mythologising language and behaviour of the dictator figure (which seeks to conceal such acts). By showing fictional subjects who realise and apply their own agency, the author succeeds in heightening consciousness and prompting a call to action outside of the text, too. In a more positive reading of Monénembo than Nganang's categorisation would suggest, I show that this comes in spite of, and maximises the spaces in between, the volatile circumstances imposed on them.

As Noémie Auzas surveys, Monénembo's characters are caught in microcosmic insecurity that reflects and is linked to the larger scale instability of history.¹⁴ The meandering evolution of Guinea is evident in the chronological progression of this thesis, and Monénembo alludes to it in the many voices of his protagonists. For example when rising nationalism shakes up the country '[la vie] emporta les Bas-Fonds dans une mouvance vertigineuse dont la roue ne faisait que s'accélérer'

¹¹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 198.

¹² Ibid., p. 203.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 198-225.

¹⁴ Noémie Auzas, *Tierno Monénembo: une écriture de l'instable* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004), p. 31.

(*Écailles*, 134). Or when Samba emerges from prison in *Écailles* to find independence gone mad: ‘On eût dit que le cordon qui rattachait à la logique du monde avait craqué, que le bon sens était tombé en désuétude. La vie avait basculé. La terre chancelait comme sous le coup d’un malin vertige.’ (150). The author expertly magnifies the smaller details of these dizzying effects which are mutually conditioned by the larger movements with a range of focalising lenses and narrative perspectives. Auzas’ survey of the motifs of this ‘insécurité quotidienne’ is helpful but does not account for their interconnected structures. This chapter will untangle just how interlinked are the emergences of instability, domination and resistance. The systematic interaction of these devices, as depicted by Monénembo, furthers our understanding of subjects’ impact on the spaces they inhabit, and the mutual conditioning of their practices.

Across his oeuvre, a large part of Monénembo’s critique comes by revealing the filth and decay of the postcolonial world. In *Écailles* his protagonist’s lack of speech gives way to heightened perspicacity: instead of speaking, what Samba sees, hears, and smells in the Bas-Fonds of Djimméyabé is prioritised. This authorial decision, also used by Barbara Kingsolver in *The Poisonwood Bible* (where Adah is the highly observant mute), facilitates the reader’s grounding herself into the text’s scenes, because any speech is bypassed to give direct access.¹⁵ The city is easily imagined with detailed multisensory description like the following passage:

Des toits, des courettes et des ruelles s’élevaient des volutes de fumée âcre. Un territoire de gadoue, d’excréments et d’odeurs fétides; un monde de détritrus, le dépotoir de Djimméyabé. Il y avait là tout ce dont la ville ne voulait pas, tout ce qui la gênait et dérangeait son luxe tranquille. Des morceaux de carton, de plastique, de bouteilles et de

¹⁵ Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* (New York: Harper Flamingo, 1998).

quincaillerie élimée. Des amas de souquenilles où des hommes
anéantis venaient s'habiller. Des ruelles en lacets, lépreuses,
recouvertes d'eaux usées et de rogatons en putréfaction finissaient en
impasse devant des puits, des buanderies ou de sordides latrines.
(*Écailles*, 103).

The tendency to distinguish surface (smooth, luxurious, problem-free) from what is hidden away (rubbish, unclean) is clear from the outset. This chapter will show how Monénembo uses physical façades and backgrounds to comment on the volatility and hypocrisy of the political world he critiques.

Everyday instability in Monénembo's textual landscapes stems largely from the poverty experienced by his protagonists. Ousted from his village and later betrayed by those he works with, Samba is left abandoned with no income. The number of others in the same position is signalled by the long queue which starts at dawn and winds back from Carrefour (*Écailles*, 105). The gradual draining of resources by corrupt governance in *Crapauds* leaves the city's inhabitants trapped and desperate without the freedom to seek needed resources. Râhi, for instance, is imprisoned at home under the watchful gaze of Daouda and Karamako, 'elle devait lui raconter tout ce qu'elle avait fait dans la journée' (*Crapauds*, 140). Oumou describes the relentless cruelty of the city to Samba: 'Cette ville ne porte rien de bon. Elle promet, elle promet, vous donne de l'envie, use vos nerfs, suce votre force, vous détruit le cœur et, pour finir, vous abandonne comme une vieille savate.' (*Écailles*, 104).

Linked obviously to this economic deficiency is localised crime. Of course the lines of legality are blurred in situations where the power holder can make or break rules at his discretion. Nonetheless, typified in the characters Binguel in *Cinéma* and Innocencio in *Pelourinho*, dishonest dealings and petty crime prevail. In

Écailles the need to put hand to mouth drives everybody into the black market when Ndourou-Wembîdo closes the markets, suspicious of traitors (*Écailles*, 158). In *Crapauds* mystery shrouds multiple secret dealings, not least that of the murder and hasty burial of Alkali, which Diouldé witnesses, stunned: ‘une énigme planait dans l’air, qui étouffait Diouldé’ (*Crapauds*, 102).

Jean-Francois Bayart’s influential *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* brings the unseen movements of contested power into sharp relief alongside imagery of appetite and greed. Laying claim to riches, and coercing others who hunger for them, is both continuous and physical.¹⁶ Mbembe writes at length about bodily metaphors (*On the Postcolony*) but for Monénembo this is a quite literal transcription of the Guinea he urgently indicts. I cite a long passage here from Alpha Diallo’s autobiographical account of his imprisonment under Sékou Touré to highlight the very real desperation for food. This happened at Camp Boiro, a concentration camp for political opponents. Here he is on the *diète noire*, a fatal method of torture where victims are deprived of all food and drink.

Je me laisse aller à rêvasser. Et tous mes rêves éveillés me ramènent inlassablement autour d’une table bien garnie où les saumons fumés le disputent aux crèmes d’asperges, aux crèmes de volaille, où je pique ma fourchette dans un tournedos Rossini ou un chateaubriand bien tendres.

J’ai faim — mon Dieu, que j’ai faim! Je revois ces dîners somptueux que je faisais dans les grands restaurants de Paris, Londres, New York où je jouais la fine bouche. Que l’occasion m’en soit redonnée, et je dévorerais à moi, tout seul, l’ensemble des mets! Que j’ai envie d’une bonne « sauce-feuille » ou d’une bonne « sauce-arachide » ou des

¹⁶ Jean-François Bayart, *L’État en Afrique: la politique du ventre* (Paris: Fayard, 1989); *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London; New York: Longman, 1993).

deux mélangées à la fois!

Que j'ai soif! De l'eau, un peu d'eau! Rien qu'une gorgée: Je ne veux rien d'autre que de l'eau: Dieu que n'avez-Vous créé l'homme avec un estomac dans lequel il pourrait emmagasiner nourriture et boisson, et s'en servir à loisir quand il aurait faim ou soif. Je voudrais pleurer, crier, gémir: peut-être que cela me soulagerait. Mais, hélas! Le poète a raison, cela ne servirait à rien!

Depuis mon arrivée ici, on ne m'a pas donné à manger et... une seule et unique fois à boire du quinquéliba. Il faut que je réussisse à tromper, à « transcender » ma faim et ma soif! Extrêmement difficile.¹⁷

This has pointed significance on the part of the dictator, which will be addressed below. Hunger is also a drive for the underdogs whose precarious situation leaves them without guaranteed sustenance. There is a sense of propelling if jerky movement forwards as the need to eat, and indeed to survive, leads characters to inhabit space in particular ways. In the next chapter of the thesis the centrality of survival is outlined in character studies of a number of Monénembo's protagonists. The old madman in *Crapauds* is a haunting reminder of the fate awaiting those abandoned to the extremes of destitution. Crazy as he is, he speaks more straightforwardly than many others in the novel, and Monénembo uses him to contrast the political *langue de bois* which surrounds him: 'Il appelait un chat un chat. Ignorant hypocrisie et flagornerie, il suivait irascible l'élan impétueux de son propre jugement', (*Crapauds*, 88). Indeed he is free from the repressive silencing most other characters experience, and voices his judgements with a scary accuracy, prophesying the dangers of being taken over by the aforementioned hunger:

¹⁷ Alpha-Abdoulaye Diallo, *La Vérité du ministre: dix ans dans les geôles de Sékou Touré* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985).

C'est lui qui déclara un jour à Diouldé: 'Le succès te grise, petit. Tu es gourmand de toi-même, tu ne te rassasies plus de ta propre vanité ni de tes petits privilèges. Mais tu as peur, comme un gosse qui a un jouet trop voyant.' (Ibid.)

The fate of Diouldé and his wife proves the madman is more clairvoyant than his frenzied fits suggest.

Alcohol is another motif of instability. Indeed, it is used to stem and escape the pain of suffering, but also to buoy the spirits of those trapped in the dictatorship's stifling space. More than anything though, the permeating presence of alcohol forms an inextricable part of the tapestry of the unstable everyday. The intensifying effect of alcohol on an already precarious stage is obvious. Drinking leads to a loss of self-control which reinforces the already uncertain and dangerous stage characters inhabit. The most explicitly violent results of drinking are seen in the deaths which occur in *Cinéma* and *Pelourinho*. However, there is a kind of insipid violence which presents itself in the atmosphere of both *Écailles* and *Crapauds*. More stylistically subtle than Monénembo's murder episodes is the perpetual threat of danger, death, kidnap or attack that lingers around every corner of the dictatorship spaces in these two novels.

Now that the interrelated characteristics of the unstable everyday stage have been explored, I will briefly note two other ways in which the author conveys the precarious circumstances of dictatorship space. Gesturing to the creativity which can arise out of unstable contexts, from text to text Monénembo himself is somewhat unpredictable in his choices of genre, language and form. Where *Crapauds* reads as a rather dense novel that is lighter on elegance than a determined sense of plot progression, *Écailles* is more stylistically experimental. Monénembo enriches the French language with splatterings of neologisms and

Africanisms that foreshadow the linguistic innovation of his Lyon-based third novel *Un Rêve utile*. The book contains a mixture of the genres the author develops later on in his career, namely legend (*Peuls*), conte (*L'Aîné*), and récit réaliste (*Rêve*). His capacity to produce books which challenge the borders of genres, fiction and history is central to his postcolonial project, and though his first two works read as dense and stylistically underdeveloped at times, this also serves to convey the stifling atmosphere of dictatorship space. This passage from *Écailles* is emblematic of the author's increased use of metaphor and stylistic techniques following his first novel: 'Pourtant, que d'âmes sibyllines peuplaient Kolisoko! Que de gens soupçonneux! Que d'ombrage et de défiance! Que d'accrocs et de morsures! Que de gentillesse calculées! Que de baisers vénéneux!' (*Écailles*, 49). The novel's stylistic diversity develops alongside Samba's wandering, moving through passages of dream and nightmare, from imagined scenarios and seemingly truthful narration, to visitations by the ghost of Sibé. Language is at times formal and elsewhere less familiar, including Peul inflections like Oumou's nickname 'thiaga', which is the Peul word for prostitute. The overall effect is one of stifled frustration, as if the dictatorship mutes and clamps at every turn, preventing any full utterance of its crimes. Inter-textually the author's stylistic variation works to reinforce the instability he describes within the fiction, at once celebrating the creative flair which can come from such diversity.

Additionally, in this novel, the tangible uncertainty is covered with a kind of phenomenological opacity. Set in an imaginary country, Samba's own dumb bemusement at what befalls him sits in a mist also unexplained to the reader. Elements of mystery like the curse under which the protagonist is born, and the presence of Sibé hover as unsolved as the sequence of events Samba is involved in. For example, when Madame Tricochet dies it is unclear if Sibé is kindly or maliciously holding her unborn child: 'Sibé tenait un enfant albinos hilare qui lui

tétait la plaie...il restait debout dans un coin de la pièce et scrutait le plafond...’
(*Écailles*, 121). With such intrusions of the supernatural Monénembo also primes his readers to question the veracity of what they read, cleverly signposting the mythologising tendencies of those in power.

The epigraph from *Écailles* reads:

Le comble de l’invraisemblable
les signes du désastre
le chimpanzé blanc
les racines de la pierre
les écailles du ciel (9).

According to this Peul proverb, scales forming on the face of the sky is one signal of the apocalypse.¹⁸ The title and epigraph of *Les Crapauds-brousse* also finds its origin in Peul mythology, thus setting a Peul imaginary at the core of Monénembo’s work from the very first word. At the beginning of time God’s favoured animal was the toad, but having been cursed it took on its current form and was banished, and though still possessing significant wisdom, remains largely despised.¹⁹ The fate of educated protagonist Diouldé is one embodiment of this same descent and exclusion: a sequence awaiting many others who offend the dictator. These two titles, therefore, like those seen in Chapter One of this thesis, root the fiction of Monénembo in Peul myths whilst announcing the danger that is to come: the perfect illustration of how the author writes both the imaginary of this nomadic people group and the violent instability of contemporary daily life in Guinea. Looming catastrophe, unpredictable terrain, and the dangerous consequences of falling out of favour with the power holder all hang in a sense of premonition. These frames, as well as the small details narrated within the texts, all

¹⁸ Kwaku Gyasi, *The Francophone African Text: Translation and the Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 99.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

form a body of literature which embodies the unstable so prevalent in the contexts the author critiques.

These elements of everyday, inter-textual, and metaphysical instability make very clear that static, binary concepts of ruler and ruled are too limited to account for the modes of territorialisation which occur (see Mbembe, above). Monénembo's literary representations of dictatorship convey something more mobile and comprehensive. What is required is a theoretical paradigm that accounts for both the dynamic nature of these power relations and the chainlike way such characteristics are linked to one another.

Patrice Nganang conceptualises dictatorship as an idea which emerges in different elements along a metonymic chain. In *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine* this is how he describes *potestas*, one form of violence which dissipates in the everyday as a dictatorship is multiplied throughout the population. This differs from *violencia*, which Nganang defines as a kind of movement which is full of potential.²⁰ An emphasis like Foucault's on one central power that punishes publicly (as with the execution of Damiens) does well to explore the theatrical stylistics of power, but in doing so Mbembe overlooks the off-stage activities of both dominant and dominated.²¹ This risks neglecting the potential for resistance, and Nganang's paradigm directs our attention to that very potential. Mbembe, although giving brief mention to the armies of allies used by a dictator, focusses more on the figure of the Big Man and his narcissism. Too much attention on a single figure may fuel that figure's desired monopoly of power, by corroborating the myth that s/he is the sole possessor of agency. Sadly this serves to fulfil the dictator's aims, particularly in the imposition of a certain social imaginary. What is

²⁰ Patrice Nganang, *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine: pour une littérature préemptive* (Paris: Homnisphères, 2007), p.202.

²¹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 16.

more, too much weight is given to the exercise of power which is overt and seen. While the effectiveness of an attention-seeking central figure is not to be underestimated, we will see below the importance of power which is exercised and resisted in more subtle ways. Though the theatrics are highly important, as I show via an emphasis on public spectacle, ostentatious dressing and speeches, this must not come at the expense of looking behind the scenes. As nomad subjects, Monénembo's characters are expert navigators of the backstage and unseen spheres. Nganang's emphasis on dictatorship as an idea, an aesthetic subject, is helpful to us in being less concerned with the figure of a Big Man, than with the emerging symptoms of a space (and text) suffering under a particular kind of enacted (necro)politics.²² The visible and invisible tactics of dictatorship reinforce one another, as state violence produces a state of violence; and for Nganang these dictatorship novels exhibit that outworked as 'l'infini métonymique de la violence comme chaîne'.²³ He sees this violence emerging in different things (evil spirits, everyday death, slave-traders) but most recurrently in African literature, in dictatorship. According to Nganang, such emergences of violence produce meanings and history, and it is the precarious dynamics that occur between and from them that is of interest in this chapter.²⁴

This helpfully frames the unstable stage on which Monénembo's action unfolds: both sustaining and intensifying the precarious status quo through multiple, related outworkings of violence.

Now I have set the scene for these dictatorship novels, I come to explore how particular discourses and behaviours are enacted. On this volatile stage, it is especially helpful to bear in mind the shifting patterns of foreground and

²² Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15:1 (2003) 11-40, where necropolitics is explained as the subjugation of life to the power of death.

²³ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 207.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

background, and to pay close attention to what is performed and what is only spoken behind the scenes.

Discourses

I begin with this idea of public and private transcripts. James Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* expertly explores the creative and mutually informed practices of power holders and those they dominate. He shows the clandestine discourses of subordinate groups critiquing power while hiding, and compares this to the oppressor's own 'hidden transcript'. In turn he emphasises the performative nature of 'public transcripts' and the confluent impact on power, hegemony, resistance and subordination.²⁵ Scott's analysis highlights the disparity between public and private discourse, and is thus highly appropriate for assessing that same gap in Monénembo's representation of dictatorship. Part of the instability so inherent to these texts arises from that very discrepancy. When Ndourou-Wembîdo, elsewhere praised as 'Guérisseur-Numéro-Un-du-Peuple' appears benevolent, for instance, in order to disguise his design to imprison his deputies, the resultant mistrust leaves all characters on edge (*Écailles*, 148, 168).

There is, on the part of the power holder, a public discourse of domination which is intentionally aligned with ideas of sovereignty as exclusive and ultimate. By fictionalising Sékou Touré, Monénembo already removes his power, making him subject to his creativity and ridicule. In his depictions of the dictator, the latter's authority is revealed as little more than a performance.

Performing an exaggerated identity, the dictator figure repeats a number of trends in order to cast himself as all-powerful. First, he has a smiling face. In *Écailles* the apparently magnanimous Ndourou-Wembîdo flashes his 'dents parfaitement blanches et régulièrement rangées' to win over his crowd (130). This is accompanied by an ostentatious 'chapeau melon, un costume prince-de-galles

²⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. xii.

quelque peu élimé et une cravate de soie' (137-8). Such appearance hosts dynamic and beguiling speeches, which always seem to take centre stage. At the pro-independence demonstration, the narrator's adverb indicates that this is par for the course: 'certes, les discours grandiloquents et les gestes ingénument triomphalistes étaient à l'honneur' (140). Mbembe comments that the art of governing includes elevating the trivial into the grandiose; and this often occurs in public speeches which need not be either as public or as long: excess and disproportion aim 'to captivate the mind's eye (*l'imaginaire*) with a Gulliverian vision of the *commandement's* deeds'.²⁶ On one occasion, Sékou Touré is reported to have spoken for over eight hours without stopping (presumably several times longer than necessary).²⁷

Heralded varyingly as 'Meilleur-Orateur-de-la-Terre-à-la-Lune-et-même-Au-delà' and 'Leader-Bien-Aimé' (168, 144), each reference to the dictator figure is overblown with gravitas and reverence, indicated by the capitalised titles and proliferation of hyphens. In Nuruddin Farah's *Sardines*, each school child has to learn the ninety-nine names of the General, one example of the ostentatious and blasphemous self-elevation which characterises the despot.²⁸ Such pervasive indicators of reverence reinforce the status of the dictator since with every reference his quasi-deified position is subconsciously concretised in the public's imaginary. This process is furthered by visual reminders of the dictator's dominance. Portraits plastered around the city mean at every turn, people see the face of the power holder watching them. 'Partout, des portraits de Ndourou-Wembôdo. Partout des drapeaux. Partout des balafons' (142). This form of silent propaganda is powerful indeed, functioning like a political marketing tool to

²⁶ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 117.

²⁷ 'La lecture interminable de ses rapports à la tribune des congrès représente une performance qui fait sa réputation auprès des journalistes étrangers. Un record, semble-t-il, est battu en septembre 1959, où il parle huit à dix heures de suite.' Ibrahima Kaké, *Sékou Touré: le héros et le tyran* (Paris: Groupe Jeune Afrique, 1987).

²⁸ Nuruddin Farah, *Sardines* (Saint Paul: Minnesota, 1992), p. 10.

convey a dual impression of unanimous power and ubiquitous surveillance. Its flimsiness and disposable nature, though, is underlined in real life instances of such posters being ripped down by children following Touré's death in 1984: a signal of the thin façade all these gestures of domination constitute, explored below.²⁹

Such stylistics serve to create a number of myths, namely of unanimity, stability and benevolence. These myths, central to nationalist projects, rework reality to form simplified, idealised representative narratives.³⁰ As Scott assesses, a substantial part of the public transcript consists in crafting a stage presence that appears masterful and self-confident.³¹ This affects the dictator's language and conduct in the creation and maintenance of these myths. First, the dictator conveys that power is held and decisions are made by him and him alone, or, if there is a team, that they operate in united cohesion. No hint of discord or diversity is advertised. Thus for example, the state-controlled radio in *Crapauds* emits the same message repeatedly:

Pendant que notre peuple entier serre les rangs derrière Sâ Matrak,
notre illustre président...des individus obscurs, des créatures nées par
hasard sur notre sol maternel rampant dans l'ombre, élaborent des
plans machiavéliques contre notre pays, notre peuple, notre cher
président (*Crapauds*, 115-6).

No contradiction or mixed messages can be seen or heard from the same source, for fear of appearing disunited and therefore fallible, indeed disagreements tend to be sequestered out of sight.³² Unity is paramount, and is imposed with fierce

²⁹ 'Dans les rues de Conakry les enfants lacèrent les portraits de Sékou Touré', Kaké, *Sékou Touré*, p. 54.

³⁰ Céline Pauthier, 'L'héritage controversé de Sékou Touré, 'héros' de l'indépendance', in *Vingtième Siècle* 118 (2013) pp. 31-44 (p. 32).

³¹ James Scott, 'Prestige as the Public Discourse of Domination', *Cultural Critique* 12, (1989), 145-166, p. 152.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

determination against the development of either division or conflict.³³ Hence the repetition of similar vocabulary, as with the above example, terms like ‘plan’ and ‘complot’ appear frequently associated with darkness. Such unanimity is supposed to indicate strength and supremacy, covering over the contradictions and divisions of ethnic strife, for example, with a one-party state solution, and driven home with repeated plural first person pronoun.³⁴ An effective façade of cohesion augments the apparent power of elites, increasing the likelihood of compliance.³⁵ Next, and connected, is the sense of resolute fixity of power which is conveyed. Though he goes by many names, the dictator figure appears unwavering in his mode of leadership (including how he presents himself and the language he uses).

Homogeneity in public behaviour is meant to create an appearance of reliability and trustworthiness: something which conflicts with the reality of the precarious settings of both novels, and further conceals the social heterogeneity (without overcoming it).³⁶ To counter the ubiquitous instability, the dictator figure employs face-saving strategies to obscure anything about himself and his rule which might detract from this impression of stability, aiming for an impression of omnipotence.³⁷ Evidence of the successful display of such ordered authority is to be found in Ladipo Adamolekun’s account of Touré’s reign, which describes the leader’s methods and structures as entirely logical and systematic.³⁸ This is one example of the public discourse cementing itself in Guinea’s historiography, something Monénembo is determined to contradict through his fiction. Lastly, as the grinning smile and brotherly handshakes indicate, the dictator identifies as a

³³ Thomas Callaghy, ‘Politics and vision in Africa: the interplay of domination, equality and liberty’, in *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power*, ed. Patrick Chabal (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 30-51 (p. 34).

³⁴ Patrick Chabal, ‘Introduction’, in *Political Domination in Africa*, pp. 1-16 (p. 8).

³⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 56.

³⁶ Jean-François Bayart, ‘Civil society in Africa’, in *Political Domination in Africa*, pp. 84-108 (p. 117).

³⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 52.

³⁸ Ladipo Adamolekun, *Sékou Touré’s Guinea: An Experiment in Nation Building* (London: Methuen, 1976).

benevolent sovereign, charismatically engaging with his people and providing for them out of his love for them. The fraternal exhortations he repeats along with his zealous greetings at public occasions, ‘avec un mouchoir aussi blanc que son sourire’ (*Écailles*, p. 139), are all part of his intentionally affectionate rhetoric. But of course, this attentive care is paired with strict surveillance:

Rien ne se fait sans son ordre. Aucune opération n’est engagée si elle n’a pas été prévue par lui. Le Président de la Guinée est devenu le Papa Bondieu distribuant mille francs CFA par-ci, des feuilles de tôles, un sac de ciment, une moto, un paquet de sucre par-là.³⁹

Often too quickly dismissed as vacuous, *la langue du bois* of these dictator figures is shown by Monénembo to be tactically contrived. Such public transcripts are designed to distract from the underhand tactics which go on. Compassionate and caring on the surface, the dictator’s hidden behaviour reveals totally polar motives.

Together the face, appearance, names, speeches and imagery of this deified persona reinforce his myth-making public discourse whilst hiding what is said and done in private. Of course this pairs with particular behaviours which drive home the dictator figure’s apparent omnipotence and serve to concretise the myths of unanimity, stability and benevolence. Scott labels this behaviour the ‘dramaturgy of domination’, and we will now look to how this consists of conflicting gestures, both seen and unseen.⁴⁰ Where the dictatorship fails is in thinking things stop with the public display, and in indeed remaining largely ignorant of the contest that happens out of sight. This is the downfall, too, of concepts of sovereignty that leave no room for resistance. Conversely, Scott centres his study behind the scenes, addressing what is ordinarily hidden from the public view of power relations to reveal hidden transcripts of domination and dissent that are more critical than a

³⁹ Amadou Diallo, *La Mort de Diallo Telli*, (Paris: Karthala, 1983), p. 118.

⁴⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 45.

sovereign figure would perceive. Michel de Certeau highlights the shortcomings of panoptic power, in that it does not account for those ‘contradictory movements’ and ‘ruses and combinations of power’ which proliferate outside its reach.⁴¹

The significance of Nganang’s paradigm of a metonymic chain comes precisely in how the different emergences of violence are interconnected. Just as the marks of everyday instability seen above are like links in a chain, so are the different gestures of domination. The very way they are linked (in relations of tension and opposition) results in greater instability: the dictator’s methods of control vacillate between being public and unannounced and this disconcerting inconsistency perpetuates the volatility of already precarious circumstances.

Spectacular and subtle gestures

Beyond the physical characteristics described above, the dictator manifests his power with an exaggerated embodiment of his body. This physicality is central to what Mbembe calls the aesthetics of vulgarity. The importance of the body in any representation of *commandement* is underlined by Monénembo, who gives much more textual weight to physical depictions than to psychological descriptions or background details. His introductory description of Gnawoulata is particularly imposing: ‘une calvitie avait occupé le crâne de ce dernier...Deux vilaines rides menaçaient les commissures des lèvres...Les dents étaient parties...En plus, il portait l’obésité, maintenant’ (*Crapauds*, 67). The reader easily visualises this man. The same kind of self-imposing physical presence is evident in *Écailles*, when the formerly grassroots nationalist Ndourou-Wembîdo gets too big for his boots and only appears before applauding crowds (*Écailles*, 137). The dictator figure and his consorts tend to take up a lot of space in public, demanding the attention of the people and sidelining any distractions. In the historiographical space of Guinea,

⁴¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: California University Press, 1984), p. 95.

this is typical of the takeover by Touré's larger than life character. Pauthier sets out how the myths surrounding him become concretised such that 'la complexité des expériences vécues par les populations guinéennes est voilée par l'omniprésence de la figure de Sékou Touré'.⁴² However, Monénembo is determined to combat this and we will see that it is in relegating the dominant to the sidelines that resistance is free to manoeuvre unnoticed.

Public spectacle is simultaneously used as an opportunity to show off wealth. In order to reel in new allies, at the same time as laying material claims on them, Gnawoulata spends money like there's no tomorrow.

'Et il savait que l'essentiel n'était pas d'avoir de l'argent, mais justement de savoir utiliser cet argent, de séduire son entourage, de faire sa renommée avec. L'argent n'était-il pas l'arme la mieux élaborée, la plus fine, la clef qui ouvrait toutes les portes, le parfum qui envoûtait tous les odorats : pour corrompre les pauvres, attirer les plus riches, se faire des liens utiles ?' (*Crapauds*, 89).

Using money as a tool for manipulation, the dictatorship seeks to accumulate as much as possible, and is willing to go to whatever means possible to secure it. The lack of proportion in Daouda's own life is evidenced when he gives a tour of his farmland. 'Pour visiter l'ensemble, il faudrait une journée entière' and the size of the farm is emphasised by the proprietor's repeated 'là-bas, là-bas' and the long list of all that is on site. As with Gnawoulata, his tone is unashamedly self-congratulating (100).

This physical occupation of space is but one of the ways Monénembo shows a propensity for excess manifested physically. The public display of assets is frequent, and is framed by Monénembo as one consequence of the rapid propulsion

⁴² Pauthier, p. 44.

into public glory at independence. This results in a premature responsibility under which the dictator clumsily parades, a bit like the balancing stunt Binguet drunkenly performs for a bet (*Cinéma*, 130). Feasting, for example is designed to convey the extent of the dictator's fortune. In *Crapauds*, overt excess and corrupt generosity recalls the president's feasts in *Le Pleurer-Rire* by Henri Lopes.⁴³ The general indulges in celebrations of affluence visible to the crowds, but makes rapid, volatile political decisions immediately after, under the misleading influence of too much Chivas.⁴⁴ In one episode of indulgence, Diouldé witnesses Gnawoulata gorge himself into a frenzy, surrounded by his 'troupeau' of wives and children (*Crapauds*, 73). As Mbembe observes, the postcolony is 'a world hostile to continence, frugality, sobriety,'⁴⁵ and for Nganang, 'le dictateur c'est l'homme dans l'ivresse de sa liberté', he is 'celui qui mange à satiété: mais son repas est le corps des habitants du pays dont il tient le cou avec ses reines'.⁴⁶ Such performance is key to the parades of enacted power which constitute these public transcripts, and highlights the dramatic element of narrative we will explore further in the next chapter. Monénembo astutely contrasts these exaggerated spectacles with the ruin and destitution suffered by those not in power which are typical of the 'monde de détrit' he critiques.

Greed

In the poverty-stricken streets of Monénembo's dictatorship spaces, hunger is pervasive. Dictatorial aesthetics of avarice manifest themselves in the bodies of the power-holders. Gnawoulata's nose, 'pris de bougeotte, éternel renifleur', is a pointed sign to his stingy nature (also given away by his nickname 'Pas-de-crédit'), further embodied by his abnormal hand '[dont les] doigts restaient crochus et

⁴³ Henri Lopes, *Le Pleurer-rire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1982), p. 125.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁵ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 110.

⁴⁶ *Manifeste*, pp. 210, 218. The peak of Monénembo's irony comes in *Écailles* when autocrat Ndourou-Wembô dies choking on a fishbone during an official dinner, p. 178.

empêchaient une complète ouverture de la main' (*Crapauds*, 66-7). The giving or withholding of money out of such hands is yet another tool used to manipulate the apparently powerless. The mouth is especially significant, not only as the source of manipulative language which is used to control and to silence, but also as a vessel for avaricious consumption.⁴⁷ Evidently, a politics of the belly is inextricably connected to the mouth. The madman's greedy self-interest is illustrative of the whole dictatorship: 'Il ne demanda jamais rien. Il se sert en mangués, manioc, igname sur les nombreux étalages de la rue.'⁴⁸ He, like Laramako later, could be further links on the chain of emerging violence, encapsulating as they do the self-serving and narcissistic nature of the dictator figure.⁴⁹ Both in his silence and ravaging greed, he stands as an allegory for how the space of dictatorship is plagued and conditioned by the mouths of those who inhabit it: language (discourse) and consumption (hunger/greed) constitute practices of territorialisation by the power-holders. Yet importantly, the madman lurks in the shadows, where other wily modes of reterritorialization are enacted by the governed.

The propensity for excess also emerges in the lecherous desires of those with power. Food and sex are closely linked, as in one particularly illustrative scene of *Crapauds*: Gnawoulata – father to thirteen and husband to four – presents his 'troupeau' to the jealous Diouldé (73). The latter is forced to eat a specially prepared feast, and the syntax crescendos as the humble occasion turns into a party: 'Gnawoulata lui-même se surpassa dans la gaieté', merely celebrating his own wealth and happiness (77). This excessive practice of enjoyment, stemming from the unlimited, almost god-like rights which the dictatorship seems to allow in its

⁴⁷ See for example the endless radio voice which anonymously announces arrests (p. 94) and Daouda's own voice, always spoken 'avec la même assurance et le même ton neutre' (p. 105).

⁴⁸ *Crapauds*, p. 83.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

leaders, often extends to sexual predation. Again the madman foreshadows the later effects of the dictatorship, when he molests passers-by (82). Greed heightened by power turns to lechery as men interact with women, to show that ‘the postcolony is a world of anxious virility’.⁵⁰ As Kaliva describes the government officials: ‘bonté divine, ce cortège ne sait que bouffer’ (59). This corroborates the overarching image of a greedy beast, always consuming. Gnawoulata takes liberties in sharing his wives with Diouldé, presented to them as ‘votre mari’ (74). The insatiable appetite for food, money, and sex is symptomatic of *violencia*, a term used by Nganang to describe a movement of violence full of potential and political energy. The sense of always looking for more links to the hungry force which can bring about, for example, independence.⁵¹

The aesthetics of vulgarity seem to multiply in the poverty-stricken city of *Écailles*. Samba’s wandering becomes a journey to sate his frustrated appetite, both with food and sex. The same villagers who welcome him, ‘titubant de fatigue et de faim’ later drive him away for having harmed a baby and wolfed down his food ‘à grandes lampées voraces’ (*Écailles*, 97, 101). The protagonist’s hunger is emblematic of the whole people’s poverty, and how their needs propel them into a perpetual moving search. The endlessness of these circumstances is suggested by one scene at Oumou’s place, where her two daughters sleep just the other side of a curtain from where she sleeps with her clients, their identical position presaging a similar fate for the girls. Despite Oumou’s best intentions, there is little hope of them escaping the cycle to become, as she wishes, ‘des dames respectables portant talons hauts et sacoches de peau d’iguane’ (109). On the surface, there is little suggestion of an escape from these cycles of perpetual hunger and predation. The city space seems suffocated by unrelenting mechanisms of control which provoke one another in a series of mutually sustaining links.

⁵⁰ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 110.

⁵¹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 202.

Lechery breeds violence in the form of rape in this same metonymic chain. It is Râhi, Diouldé's wife, who most horrifically falls victim to the sex- and power-hungry cruelty of those in authority. She is raped repeatedly by Daouda and by Laramako: 'Enlève ton slip' répéta-t-il plus sourdement. Elle enleva son slip avec une main tremblotante. Des jours et des jours passèrent...' (*Crapauds*, 139).

Daouda's quietness is typical of his reign of intimidation, which relies on silence (and silencing) as a key tool of control. The ellipsis points to the subjugation Râhi endures: any response is silenced by the domineering presence of her oppressor(s). As we saw above, the pervasive presence and excessive consumption of alcohol adds another element of danger to this gorging, like when Binguel insults a prostitute having drunk too much at the bar (*Cinéma*, 130). These texts hinge on volatile, temporary states of calm and safety.

Violence

These are more often than not punctured with violence, which is always present for Monénembo. As well as the panorama of everyday violence sketched out earlier in this chapter, there are specific instances of violence in these two texts. Rape scenes are one extreme of this, but murder and death are also widespread. In his 2003 article 'Necropolitics', Mbembe suggests the conflation of politics and death is to be commonly found in situations like the postcolony:

The perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security—this, I suggest, is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristic of both early and late modernity itself.⁵²

⁵² Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15:1 (2003) 11-40, (p.18).

Indeed on the pages of *Les Crapauds-brousse*, violence as defence of sovereignty is almost omnipresent. The dictator figure goes to extraordinary ends in order to display publicly his right to kill. Multiple arrests, mass corruption, and kidnappings all foreshadow the wave of murders which spreads through the city. The result is a fearful existence where ‘il fallait, avec cet homme, s’attendre à tout’ (*Crapauds*, 15, 57, 111). Describing the same atmosphere of dread in his 1966 novel *Dramouss*, Camara Laye writes,

A nos portes, à la porte de nos geôles, veille la peur. Dans notre sang,
coule la peur. Oh, que nous avons peur, dans cette prison lugubre !
Peur de nous promener dans la cour, peur de recevoir une balle dans le
dos, peur de mourir!⁵³

In other novels by Monénembo, the same trend is to be found, indeed, violence is ubiquitous. In *Le Roi de Kahel* and *Cinéma* respectively, Olivier de Sanderval faces repeated threats on his life by local chieftains, and the young Binguel’s ‘envie de tuer’ leads him to keep his gun ever close – a response to the violent punishments he encounters at school, and the aggressive tirades of Mère-Griefs (*Cinéma*, 44, 54, 80, 92-3). We will see that the sense of fear does not deny the presence of hope or criticism, but it is nonetheless very strong.

In his chapter ‘On Commandement’ in *On the Postcolony*, Mbembe states that a trinity of violence, transfers and allocations forms the basis of postcolonial African authoritarian regimes.⁵⁴ Indeed it is easy to see in Monénembo’s texts that these are interrelated on the dictatorship’s metonymic chain: threats of violence are yoked inextricably with self-invented claims on material and personal possessions, and these go in hand with the restraint and withdrawal of financial and other

⁵³ Camara Laye, *Dramouss*, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1966), p. 214.

⁵⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 45.

allocations. These elements are linked together so as to reinforce one another in a bid to instil a social imaginary of hegemony, and yet do not deny outright the presence of hope or criticism.

What is particularly significant in rendering this trinity an unquestionable part of the social imaginary is the public performance of the practices I have listed. The deliberate display of power is conducted as a tactic of intimidation, intended to shock and condition particular responses.⁵⁵ In order to drive home their sovereignty, power-holders surround their practices with a sense of grandeur. Though they themselves may not appear (indeed Sâ Matrak is not seen at all), their necropolitical practices often appear as part of a public spectacle. Manifesting the power of dictatorship in this way is a vital tactic in spreading fear and intimidation. When Oklahoma Kid's gang beat up Linguih in *Cinéma*, they choose the public square not only to humiliate him publicly but also so that the effect of their threats will spread wider than just the immediate victim (*Cinéma*, 74). In the same way, to suppress a strike demanding higher salaries, Ndourou-Wembîdo 'fit venir des bataillons de soldats et de miliciens...une centaine d'ouvriers furent fusillés et jetés dans des bacs d'acide' (*Écailles*, 168). These examples are frighteningly close to accounts given by those imprisoned in Campo Boiro during Touré's reign. There too, a young prisoner attempting escape was made an example of for those in other cells: 'Tôt repris, battu presque à mort, ligoté dans une cellule, il empêcha tout le camp de dormir, hurlant comme un chien, des heures sans discontinuer.'⁵⁶ The

⁵⁵ Eleni Coundouriotis, *Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 99.

⁵⁶ Jean-Paul Alata, *Prison d'Afrique*, (Paris: Seuil, 1976), Chapitre XIV, <http://www.campboiro.org/bibliotheque/alata_jp/prison_afrique/regneO.html> [accessed 12 May 2015]

ostentatious display of manpower and horrific violence stands as a quasi-ritualised warning to potential dissenters.⁵⁷

Tactics of disappearance

These instances of domination largely happen outwardly and openly, yet are paired with tactics of disappearance that are carried out in the dark. Once again the disparity between seen and unseen results in instability: where public acts of benevolence give one impression of those in power, the secret crimes betray more harmful intentions; and where public acts of violence might suggest the power holders are brash and unthinking, the wily, insidious spread of tactics that happens beneath the surface indicates a far more intentionally constructed schematics of power. Whether the façade is one of benevolence or unanimity of style, the private discourse of the dictatorship reveals conscious sets of practices that go beyond superficial impressions designed to create limited ideas of the power holders.

In each of *Crapauds* and *Écailles* one protagonist is captured: Diouldé never to be seen again and Samba to be imprisoned without trial. Countless others disappear without explanation, and Monénembo aptly renders that ambiguity with the air of mystery which hangs over *Écailles*. Bandiougou's narrative meanders around unknowns describing a time which was 'confuse, boueuse, glissante, peu propice à la fixation de la mémoire' (*Écailles*, 168-9). This recalls of course the opacity surrounding details of Touré's regime, and the mythologising which sought to cover over that lack of clarity with imposed narratives of stability, unanimity, and benevolence. Also covered over have been the traces of individuals who disappeared on his decree, and the physical evidence of Camp Boiro (home to a series of detached houses since 2010).⁵⁸ Monénembo's descriptive shading, where shadows hang over most of the plot, is to draw attention to the opacity he pierces

⁵⁷ Achille Mbembe, 'Provisional notes on the Postcolony', *Africa: journal of the International African Institute*, 62:1 (1992), 3-37 (p. 13).

⁵⁸ Pauthier, p. 41.

through elsewhere. Regarding the same crimes, in a 2009 article in *Le Monde* he decries ‘le fameux camp Boiro où 50 000 personnes (prêtres, marabouts, ingénieurs ou médecins pour la plupart) ont disparu dans les mains du sanguinaire Sékou Touré’.⁵⁹ These tactics of disappearance are rife in Monénembo’s fiction. Kidnaps and disappearances were brutal yet calculated, often happening at night time, taken like Diouldé ‘par une nuit sans lune’ (*Crapauds*, 123). So the dictatorship is like a beast, but not a brainless one. The figure of an octopus, which Monénembo himself uses, does well to express both the hidden and the multiple nature of this exertion of power. From an early description Sâ Matrak uses to describe a supposed plot against him, we find the ideal image for the dictatorial system he heads up: ‘[c]’était une énorme manœuvre, une pieuvre aux tentacules infinis’ (*Crapauds*, 119), and in *Écailles*, ‘une petite pieuvre qui avait graduellement étendu ses tentacules depuis les Bas-Fonds jusqu’aux recoins du pays’ (138). This recalls the Italian *piovra*, commonly used to refer to the Mafia, and invokes an image of power spreading insidiously to breed threat around every corner. Space is taken over in different forms, like tentacles controlled by an unseen head, which suddenly appear one by one, out of nowhere, to violently take out their victims. Such an image matches Diouldé’s disoriented confusion, ‘[il] ne comprenait rien à rien’ (*Crapauds*, 109), as well as the enigmatic tone of *Écailles* in which protagonist Samba struggles to understand the mysteries of lives which are ‘entraînées dans une mécanique hors de portée de notre compréhension’ (40). It is both gradually and suddenly that these tentacles spread and snatch, and this fluctuating pace adds to the unpredictability of life under dictatorship.

The prevailing presence of this intimidating gaze (though the eyes may remain unseen) is striking. The success of the dictatorship rests on instilling a fear of being watched, and thus conveying an impression of omniscience. The sense of

⁵⁹ Tierno Monénembo, ‘La Guinée, cinquante ans d’indépendance et d’enfer’, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2009.

surveillance is ubiquitous. In *Écailles* the marabout speaks of a divine ‘intraitable créancier [qui] nous guette du haut de sa tour céleste et voit tout ce que nous faisons à la lueur des astres...Il ne nous quitte jamais des yeux’ (40). The quasi-divine (or at least divinely-appointed) status of the *Responsable suprême* attributes him a similar panoramic vision, or so it seems. And this suppresses the freedom and conditions the behaviour of those under his gaze: ‘L’envie ne le quittait pas de mettre au moins Râhi dans son secret: le regard globuleux de Daouda, son regard de blanc d’œuf cuit l’en dissuadait’ (*Crapauds*, 109). Such surveillance is only achieved because, following the image, the octopus has many legs. Control is exacted by multiple people, not the solitary dictator figure who claims to hold power alone. Mbembe, although giving brief mention to the armies of allies used by a dictator, fails to redress the power imbalance by drawing attention to the number of others who practise and respond to necropolitical power.⁶⁰ Just as in *Écailles* the ever-shifting distribution of power is complex because it is widely shared and geographically spread, so in *Les Crapauds-brousse* Sâ Matrak’s reign is dispersed through a number of other actors. ‘Tout bon commerçant doit avoir une gamme d’amis bien placés, chacun à un poste vital’ (97). Dictatorship emerges in a number of actors; it is as if the network of agents is sprawling ever wider, like the tentacles of a beast-like scheme. Sâ Matrak remains unseen throughout the whole novel; instead, *la dictature* is represented in a web of henchmen, a kind of machine controlled by the State, designed to perpetuate a state of violence whilst increasing and perpetuating its sovereignty. A picture limited to one sovereign figure is insufficient, because the methodology of dictatorship relies on its multiple outlets, giving further utility to the multilegged octopus image. Where a removed, omniscient narrator could be the vehicle for representing this pervasive

⁶⁰ The self-referential, narcissistic side of dictatorship is extremely evident in each of the novels mentioned in this chapter. See in particular another foreshadowing passage on p.88 of *Crapauds* where the madman warns Diouldé against self-centredness, and later at pp. 68-72, where the change in narrative to free indirect discourse marks an excessively self-congratulatory attitude as Gnawoulata recounts his success stories.

surveillance, in fact it is the roaming nomad subjects who lead Monénembo's stories. The significance of their own observing for resistance will be made clear below.

Nganang describes dictatorship as an idea, which emerges in a multitude of ways, at once revealing that an appearance of unitary control is often a mask and reducing the impact a power-holder seeks to retain by promulgating the myth that authority is exclusively his. When instead we consider dictatorship as 'un sujet littéraire – esthétique' manifest in multiple ways along Nganang's metonymic chain, the more subtle and complex *systematic* outworkings of power and will are revealed.⁶¹ This image of a sprawling network of agents who do a dictator's 'leg-work', in covert ways, is useful. They literally provide multiple physical outlets for dictatorial control, and are connected to one another in different relations of proximity and familiarity, much like the other emergences of power listed above that are mutually sustaining. Because of the volatile nature of the dictator's preferences, those employed for particular jobs will depend on where his favour lies. In Alpha Diallo's account of his imprisonment and torture in Camp Boiro, he describes a series of officials at that time in Sékou Touré's trusted circle who carry out the dirty work on his behalf. In 'la cabine technique' for example, 'la pièce est pleine de gendarmes et de gardes'.⁶² Clearly, delegating in this way enables the Big Man to maintain his smiling face and façade of benevolence whilst his committee pummel his desired truth out of the accused.

In order to hide from these huntsmen and the eyes of the dictatorship, people gather temporarily in shadowy, hidden places, or retreat to their homes. Just like in Farah's dictatorship novels (written at a similar time), this births fear and hiding in everyday situations. So Monénembo's Samba keeps himself concealed just like

⁶¹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 204.

⁶² Alpha Diallo, 'Mon interrogatoire', *La vérité du ministre: dix ans dans les geôles de Sékou Touré* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985).

Loyaan in *Sweet and sour milk* (Écailles, 174, 177).⁶³ And yet the invasion of the dictatorship knows no bounds, and the extreme of hidden deviousness is the intrusion into the domestic space. Perhaps the best illustration of where physical and psychological domination convene is the aforementioned rape. Where Sara Suleri has rightly argued that the metaphor of rape, when discussing the colonial dynamic, unhelpfully distracts from more complex and relevant gendered power contests, it is nonetheless helpful here.⁶⁴ Knowing that the perpetrators of most cases of domestic violence are known to the victim, this is an instance of the up close and personal usurped and exploited. Literally Monénembo is revealing what occurs behind closed doors, and its poignancy comes in that this example is *postcolonial*, at home, treacherous and horrifically intimate. Indeed it is in domestic territory that the covert practices of dictatorship are most harrowingly deployed: public displays of authoritarianism drive people fearfully into their own homes, but there is no permanent safety there. There is a close-to-home bitterness to post-colonial dictatorship, where unlike the colonial ruler, the power-holder is home-grown, and intimately connected with the homeland and its people (though as I show below, not particularly knowledgeable about them). The dictator figure makes his rule an intricate family affair, usurping relational networks to perpetuate his dominance. Part of the dictator's public discourse will likely include severe critique of corruption, dressed up in terms like 'family loyalties' and 'protecting one's own'.⁶⁵

⁶³ Nuruddin Farah, *Sweet and sour milk* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 1979).

⁶⁴ Suleri contests that in the case of Anglo-India, colonialism's master narrative of rape reduces the violated female body to a metaphor and deflects from the discursive homoeroticism which in fact has more sway in establishing colonial power. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 61.

⁶⁵ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 226. Elizabeth Schmidt emphasises how loyalty was valued above all else during Touré's regime and how tactics of intimidation were used to secure it. Elizabeth Schmidt, 'Pan-Africanism, People's Power, and Decolonization in Ghana and Guinea: The Uneven Legacy of Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré', in *Africa, Empire and Globalization: Essays in honor of A.G. Hopkins*, ed. Toyin Falola, Emily Brownell, and Antony Hopkins (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2011) pp.525-540 (p. 537).

Family language prevails in representations of post-Independence nations. Lopes' characters must call their president 'Tonton', for example.⁶⁶ As Nganang describes the dictator, 'il copule avec toute femme qui porte sur son corps la tenue du parti sur laquelle figure son visage; voilà le côté le plus poussé de son intimité'.⁶⁷ Monénembo pinpoints the tension between intimacy and adulation after Independence in *Écailles* where 'les femmes portaient des tembourés Indépendance, taillés dans un tissu imprimé où l'on voyait Ndourou-Wembêdo en tenue de guerrier' (*Écailles*, p. 144). As Farah puts it, 'power doesn't need invitations. They come when they please'.⁶⁸ Hence the significance of Daouda raping Râhi and then moving in with her: the dominant and the dominated share the same space (*Crapauds*, p. 139). This enforced conviviality is shown by rape, by the ironic use of familial vocabulary, and by a series of intimate collusions which are followed by betrayal. Monénembo subverts those portrayals of African community celebrated by Cheikh Anta Diop by exposing the superficial nature of language in this way.⁶⁹ By elucidating the treachery that occurs between compatriots on home territory, Monénembo shows the 'common origins' agenda to be misplaced. Whereas Mbembe argues that this enforced conviviality precludes resistance, I will show below that such proximity is turned to the advantage of wily *débrouillards*.⁷⁰ Here paternalism and authoritarianism are combined. The dangers of conviviality are made clear: when Diouldé's mother literally puts him in the hand of Gnawoulata and names the latter as his brother, the term sticks.⁷¹ Familial vocabulary is a feature from then on and Gnawoulata's presence soon becomes an unmissable part of the group. 'Quelques jours plus tard, sa seule absence aurait crié

⁶⁶ Lopes, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Patrice Nganang, *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine: pour une littérature préemptive*, p.205. See above and the significance of the dictator's ravenous feasting on his own compatriots.

⁶⁸ Farah, *Sweet and sour milk*, p. 165.

⁶⁹ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations, nègres et cultures* (Paris: Éditions africaines, 1955).

⁷⁰ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, pp. 104, 118.

⁷¹ See Nganang, *Manifeste*, '[le dictateur] et ses victimes...sont en réalité frères', p. 204.

comme celle d'un membre manquant à un corps' (*Crapauds*, 79). Gnawoulata's language imposes this intimacy, as he uses it to persuade Diouldé to join their schemes and disable him from escaping, tying him in for instance with the repeated second person pronoun: 'Tu dois nous aider...Fais-moi un rapport sur tout ce que tu connais...' (113).⁷² Unsurprisingly, the affection, generosity and intimacy is reduced to nothing (silence), proved hollow when Diouldé is taken away in chapter nine. In the same vein, in *Écailles* Monénembo continues this pattern of hypocrisy with intimate language as when Ndourou-Wembîdo appears to greet Bandiougou and Samba as brothers, when in fact he is sending them to prison. 'Il lui donna une chaleureuse accolade et lui dit: 'Au revoir, frère' en le regardant de ses yeux clairs et veloutés' (148).

In his autobiographical account, after the aforementioned torture, Diallo receives a personal phone call from the president. I cite it here in full to indicate how Touré's twisted modus operandi puts such cruelty right alongside apparently magnanimous care.

« Ne t'en fais pas mon cher, je te sortirai de ce mauvais pas... »

J'ai envie de lui crier à tue-tête toute mon indignation, mais à quoi bon? Ce ne serait qu'un simple coup de sabre dans l'eau, absolument inutile. Je suis vaincu, c'est fini.

— « Fais-moi confiance, poursuit-il. Du courage et que Dieu te protège. »

Il ne faut pas qu'il se rende compte de mon état d'âme: il faut que je m'efforce d'avoir l'air complètement détendu comme lui. Je suis vaincu, certes, mais je refuse de mettre le genou à terre.

— « Je vous remercie et mes hommages à Madame la Présidente... »

⁷² The language of familiarity used here reveals the intimate knowledge the dictator possesses of his people, which distinguishes him from the coloniser, whose ignorant assumptions misjudge the colonised (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 33).

Mais je ne sais vraiment pas si ma voix n'est pas légèrement
chevrotante comme la sienne, cette nuit de novembre! Il termine :
« Je les lui transmettrai. Encore, courage et à bientôt!
— Adieu... »
C'est fini. Je raccroche, Ismaël me regarde et dit en souriant
— « Tu vois que tu n'as pas à t'en faire. Le grand frère te considère
toujours comme un ami. C'est comme nous tous d'ailleurs... »⁷³

This “intimate repression” is perhaps the epitome of hypocrisy, when Touré and Ismaël claim affinity and affection for Diallo in the immediate aftermath of his torture, commanded by the former and committed by the latter.⁷⁴ The term of endearment, the appeal for divine protection, the words of encouragement, together with Ismaël's cheap use of ‘frère’ and ‘ami’ bleach such terms of authenticity and warmth. Ironically it is this familiar language that for Aimé Césaire marks out Touré as an exemplary African leader: ‘c’est sans doute là ce qui, en définitive, le met hors de pair en Afrique: cette liaison quasi charnelle avec la masse dont il parle non seulement la langue mais, ce qui est plus important, le langage’.⁷⁵ But Monénembo shows mistrust growing as the superficiality of affection and language is elucidated.

The fact of being constantly watched and this discrepancy between the language of intimacy and cruel behaviour add further threats to the unstable terrain of these spaces. The coupling of physical and psychological tactics of domination in the public and private discourses of the power holders strengthens their territorialisation of actual and conceptual space. The control exerted in this way on postcolonial space results in a highly pressurised atmosphere, aptly conveyed by

⁷³ Diallo, *La Vérité du ministre*, ‘Ismael flanche à son tour’.

⁷⁴ Bayart, *Political Domination in Africa*, p. 114.

⁷⁵ Aimé Césaire, ‘La pensée politique de Sékou Touré’ in *Présence Africaine* 185-186 (2012), 155-164, (p. 156).

Monénembo's remarkably dense language in these two novels (there is little change in pace through the novels, and sentences often read as overly lengthy and laboured). Seeing this as a straightforward example of sovereignty would suggest that resistance has no room to manoeuvre and that the dictatorship is unbending and unanimous in its methodology. Yet when we frame these practices in Nganang's metonymic chain of violence we see that the dictatorship is more complicated than that former outline, and the myths it seeks to produce and promulgate about its own identity are ephemeral. By using a clever combination of animal imagery and deliberately interconnected emergences of enacted power, Monénembo portrays the dictatorship as something at once highly complex (full of contradiction, and perpetuating instability) but also something which can be challenged and resisted, and in some ways overcome. This is a beast, yes, but one to be tamed. The various emergences of power are interconnected and mutually strengthened, but neither infallible nor completely invisible. Indeed, the grounded position and mobility of the people being dominated renders them experts in deciphering all that is supposed to be veiled from the public eye. They reveal the discrepancies between seen and unseen, and spoken and unspoken, on the part of the dominant, whilst acting out their own 'sly infrapolitics'.⁷⁶ Monénembo's narratives, told from the perspective of underdogs, reveal *these* hidden transcripts as well, showing two things: that domination and resistance are not as distinct as might be portrayed or conceived, and that resistance is occurring in many places at many times.

Monénembo, in emphasising what is hidden, not only shows up the dark(er) sides of dictatorship, but unveils the underground world of resistance. What transpires is that resistance is founded on spotting the hypocrisies of those in power. Thus the underdogs are able to see tactics of disappearance, spectacles of excess and

⁷⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 199.

violence, and veils of intimacy for what they are. They can dissimulate such awareness to feed the dominant's belief in their ignorance, and this strengthens their power further. Moving below the surface in this way, the author works towards understanding the multiplicity of networks operating underground in the postcolonial state, heeding Bayart's call in this way to 'do more than examine the institutional buds above ground'.⁷⁷ Following Certeau's claim that spatial practices secretly structure the determining conditions of social life, Monénembo shows that in response to the ceaseless chain of violence, subjects are capable of eluding discipline within the very field in which it is exercised.⁷⁸ In foregrounding imagery of shadows, clouds, and darkness he highlights the covert practices of the underdogs, as well as the dictator's hidden transcripts. Though the latter's tactics of disappearance undoubtedly lead to violence, intimidation, and oppression, this does not remain unchallenged.

In both novels, death haunts the streets of the city spaces. The ominous presence of ethereal characters like Samba's late uncle Sibé and the mad man is jarring, and they stand out amongst otherwise predominantly young characters as if to bring warnings from the afterlife. In *Crapauds*, the imposing wall of the *Tombeau* stands as both a very real example of the violent punishment occurring, and also as a symbolic threat. Intentionally placed in the centre of the city (much like Touré's Camp Boiro in Conakry), the walls are designed to intimidate, and exemplify the overt, physical displays enacted within the dictatorship to convey an impression of ultimate control. And yet, the *Tombeau* remains exactly that, an impression or surface. Râhi, on approaching the *Tombeau*, knows the threat the wall represents, but she isn't trapped by it: Kandia takes her away from its luring intrigue (*Crapauds*, 148). As a nomadic subject, literally weaving her way in secret around the streets of the city, but also psychologically dexterous and imaginative, Râhi is

⁷⁷ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 220.

⁷⁸ Certeau, *The Practice*, p. 96.

excellently placed to see things as they are. This critique of superficiality is central to Monénembo's political project. His fictional exposure of the hypocrisy and flimsiness of Sékou Touré's regime is pointed and thorough. Both in *Cinéma* (described in the next chapter) and *Écailles* the hyper-celebrated independence of the country is relayed in scathing terms as no more than a covering up of the grime and ruptures which pervade this postcolonial space. The physical space of the city stands as an allegory for the whole country's political landscape: 'Les potences furent enguirlandées et ornées de lumignons polychromes. Les cadavres des suppliciés furent recouverts de serpentins et de confettis. Un déodorant subtilement élaboré fut répandu par fûts entiers sur les eaux croupies des ornières' (*Écailles*, 160). Monénembo's underdog characters see the hypocrisy and mythologizing of the dictator figures as façades (or simple walls) of unity and stability, cracked by the very instability they impose. There is nothing solid about the language or behaviour of those in control, and the mobility of those they govern frees them to see not only the stage which hosts such public performances, but also behind the scenes, with remarkable lucidity. Thus like its other physical symbols of power, whilst being a structure which intimidates, the *Tombeau* also creates the very shadows which host inconspicuous, wily resistance, to which this kind of awareness and perspicacity are vital.

Resistance

Contrary to what the dictator figure thinks, the collective imaginary of the people consists of far more than his public discourse would seek to instil. Far from resting on the myths of unanimity and trustworthiness purveyed by the dictator's public acting, they see through that as a façade. Instead, they are aware of the insidious schemes he enacts and this shared knowledge contributes to their collective imaginary. As Bayart observes, 'the 'small-men' are frequently up-to-date with the stratagems of the 'big men'. They follow these with sceptical attention, and

demonstrate an undeniable civic knowledge which contrasts strongly with the poverty of the media.⁷⁹ Dominated subjects are less socially anchored than others and have lifestyles which encourage physical mobility.⁸⁰ Their ways of being include such extensive sidestepping and such perceptive observation of the powerholders that models based on the panopticon are insufficient. We must not overestimate the immobilising power of the dictatorship. Via the mobile narrative perspectives of his moving protagonists Monénembo conveys this gathered awareness. Samba and Râhi, as wanderers of their respective local streets, piece together all they see behind the scenes to form a comprehensive consciousness that is empowering and unifying in its own right. Formed at a sceptical distance, the strength of such awareness (of the extent of the dictator's private discourse) lies in the way it gives people the capacity to relegate claims of unanimous, stable, and benevolent sovereignty to their right status as myths or ideas, thus disempowering the sovereign who thinks this parade of power is convincing all round. This consciousness provides critical leverage against the idealised image of the powerholder.⁸¹ In a clandestine gathering towards the end of *Crapauds*, Kandia intimates his knowledge of the authorities' flaws, 'ils sont plus experts dans la tuerie que dans le mensonge' (179). Where power holders aim to convey clarity and control across the board, their façades are seen through by those nomadic subjects who move between different spaces formulating a savvy street wisdom.

The dictatorship seems heavy duty, imposing as it does its 'mur de lamentations', but is not beyond resistance (*Crapauds*, 147). In fact its covert methodologies engender shadows which allow for resistance to thrive with its own hidden practices. There is certainly no denial of the inclemency and horror of the dictatorial oppression present in these texts, indeed it is the object of Monénembo's

⁷⁹ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 219.

⁸⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 124.

⁸¹ Mikael Karlström, 'On the Aesthetics and Dialogics of Power in the Postcolony', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 73:1 (2003), 57-76, (p. 72).

strongest critique. There is no naivety in the informed awareness of the author's protagonists: these nomadic subjects are more than streetwise underdogs, they are politically informed and engaged agents. Their wisdom draws upon an almost mystical acceptance of the miseries of the human condition in order to come to terms with the power and its wrongdoing.⁸² Monénembo's dictatorship novels are grounded in 'highly specific geopolitical and historic locations',⁸³ the most informed knowledge of which is possessed by those who live and move in the wings alongside staged performances. Samba's redundancy is turned to his advantage because it leaves him the time to wander, observe, and get to know his surroundings.

Entre-temps, lui et la ville s'étaient suffisamment épiés pour se connaître davantage. Il avait occupé sa journée à l'essayer, à l'étudier, à mesurer son importance, ses atouts et ses failles (*Écailles*, 106).

Though banished out of his control to the backstreets and queues for casual labour, Samba maximises the opportunities this kind of existence entails by getting in behind the scenes, like in the Tricochet house. He makes a way for himself: 'Le broussard avait trouvé un créneau dans l'imbroglio de la ville, se faisait aux exigences du monde moderne, s'adaptait doucement...' (*Écailles*, 109, 112).

This kind of practical wisdom, gained through a *débrouillard* existence in the incertitude and brutality of the everyday, is typical of the nomadic mindset. It differs from a well-informed or abstractedly intelligent consciousness in that it is highly practical. Subjects learn by living through the self-perpetuating vicissitudes listed at the beginning of this chapter.

⁸² Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 249.

⁸³ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 10.

Monénembo's project of recasting the postcolonial subject works against representations which detract from actors' agency due to overemphasising their stark circumstances.⁸⁴ In the midst of spirals of violence, the savvy of the underdogs is strengthened:

La terre pourrait s'ouvrir, le monde de décrocher... Mille fois tournée et retournée dans le fournil de l'Histoire, la négraille avait appris à se faire à tout. Elle savait flairer la bourrasque du pire, savait l'attendre, le corps faussement vacillant, mais les pieds comme des souches dans la terre ferme. Les discours de Ndourou-Wembîdou, les pléthoriques potences aux cadavres nus en voie de putréfaction, les prisons, les supplices et les humiliations n'y pouvaient rien. On ne se démontrerait pas pour pire que cela, semblait-on se dire (*Écailles*, 158-9).

No matter what, it seems, the people do not merely cope or get by, but excel at surviving. So as well as enabling a relegation of power holders' performances and myth-making to ineffectual fiction, this shared awareness is applied as practical street-wisdom. Nomad subjects move around so that from the wings or behind the scenes they see the stage, its actors, and their public scripts for what they are, and are able to negotiate the whole space with understated alacrity. In 'Necropolitics', Mbembe alludes to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the war machine:

'polymorphous and diffuse organisations, capable of metamorphosis, mobility, and a range of relations to the State'.⁸⁵ This figure finds expression in these characters in their continued mobility, travelling light and outwitting of the enemy with quick, surprise tactics.

This shared mindset also includes awareness of their own agency as subjects. As Braidotti describes, nomadic subjects tap into a source of productive power,

⁸⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 225.

⁸⁵ Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', p. 30.

embodying and enacting an affirmative capacity or *potentia*, to bring creativity and transformation to their contexts.⁸⁶ A number of procedures enacted by these agents, as Certeau describes, are far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, and

have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, developed and insinuated themselves into the networks of surveillance, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization.⁸⁷

Their mobile imaginary, characterised by *débrouillardise*, doesn't necessarily lead them to be on the move physically all of the time, but it engenders a particular psychological dexterity. This means that they are conscious of the varied ways in which they can respond to the oppression and suffocating surveillance of the dictatorship. Scott details the artistic aspect of such resistance, showing how creative those practices of undisclosed resistance are which circumnavigate supposedly impenetrable domination. He describes the private discourse of resistance as a sly infrapolitics which relies on in between spaces and clandestine tactics, and helpfully articulates the 'immense political terrain' which lies between quiescence and revolt.⁸⁸ Oversimplified notions of resistance tend to bypass this land, but it is here, in the contested space of the nomads' land, that real ground is lost and gained.

Escapism

Part of the sly infrapolitics of the apparently powerless does include physical evasion. The ability to hide and escape from the panoramic gaze of the dictator is

⁸⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 12.

⁸⁷ Certeau, *The Practice*, p. 96.

⁸⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 199.

key. Though this is temporary since, as described above, there is often intrusion into the domestic space, there is nonetheless a readiness for furtive evasion. Central to the *débrouillard* mindset that Râhi, Kandia, Samba, Oumou, and others share, is a readiness to move. With an efficiency that matches (and thus undermines) the power holders' own paths to success, Oumou's determined pragmatism sets the rhythm of their daily life. Samba is sent out each morning to seek employment; later he comes home weekly bringing the spoils of his well-placed resourcefulness; and Oumou's own connectedness to a network of others in Djimméyabé serves her well, albeit largely established via prostitution (*Écailles*, 106, 111, 108). In spite of his fate, Monénembo hints at a veiled victory for Diouldé, whose name in Peul means survivor.⁸⁹ In different ways these characters work to avoid the immobilising claws of poverty and destitution.

Their escapism is not always physical though, and encompasses internal 'flights' which to some extent remove the character from what surrounds them. Indeed, it is consciousness-raising and the subversion of set conventions which define the nomadic state, rather than the literal act of travelling.⁹⁰ The knowledge accumulated through their ongoing and clandestine covering of space leaves these subjects well-informed, and far from being naively thrust into different states of mind, they are able to choose consciously to digress, distract, divert from the horrific realities of the everyday. Kandia tells Râhi why he and his companions choose to drink, for example. Monénembo has these characters make empowered choices, fully aware of all that is going on around them (listed at length) and deciding to set themselves at a distance. I cite this passage to show just that:

Nous buvions donc pour planer au-dessus des mesquineries
quotidiennes : murmures – écoutes – dénonciations – arrestations –

⁸⁹ Mohamed Keïta, *Tierno Monénembo: une approche psychocritique de l'œuvre romanesque* (Paris: Harmattan, 2014), p. 18.

⁹⁰ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 26.

exécutions – acclamations des chauds militants – messages de félicitations des partis frères et amis. Pour nous, la solution était de boire et de regarder tout ça d'un œil froid. Boire au lieu de suivre les cours. Boire au lieu d'assister aux pendants publics, boire au lieu d'écouter la voix de faux chanteur de blues du président, boire pour se moquer d'une bougresse de fille qui pleure et rit de son père pendu. Boire pour vomir sur un paysan galeux qui vous raconte ses misères. Boire et cracher sur une veuve de comploteur qui se plaît à coucher avec un ministre. Boire et faire boire... (*Crapauds*, 151-2).

The repetitions in this passage indicate just how astutely conscious Kandia is of what is occurring in the space around them, seeing through any pretence. They equally show how he is empowered: each instance of 'boire au lieu de' is illustrative of those who are apparently powerless affirming their freedom to choose how they respond. Emboldened and/or numbed by drink, they are able to name the horrors of the dictatorship. Ultimately of course this drinking also buoys them to plan a final escape from the city. We saw earlier how alcohol feeds the precariousness and tension of the space of dictatorship, but because this is self-inflicted it places the power back in the hands of those who are thought of as powerless victims to that volatility.

I must emphasise again that this escapism in no way stems from denial or ignorance, and nor does Monénembo downplay the horror of the circumstances. Rather, these characters face death and violence head on. In a study of the disadvantaged inhabitants of Ibadan, Peter Gutkind argues that it is through a common struggle that common sentiments, attitudes and perceptions are produced.⁹¹ They are fully aware of the tensions and dangers which lurk around

⁹¹ Peter Gutkind, 'The View from Below: Political Consciousness of the Urban Poor in Ibadan', *Cahier d'Études Africaines* 15:57, (1975), 5-35 (p. 13).

and then respond in ways which perpetuate that, furtively working to own and direct the space they inhabit. As Scott adds, ‘the hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation’.⁹² It is often from their position on the sidelines that these subjects most lucidly see what is occurring around them. Having chosen to remove themselves from the hyped cacophony of mining which overtakes the Bas-Fonds, Monénembo’s underdogs acquire a clearer picture of what is unfolding. ‘Dans notre farniente salubre, nous regardions le temps passer dans la rue; un temps de plus en plus fou, de plus en plus pressé d’en découdre avec les promesses’ (*Écailles*, 163). Ultimately it is solely by acquired cunning that the group escapes:

seules, l’opiniâtreté et la connaissance de la brousse peuvent déplacer la balance. La brousse est une chose trop méchante pour qu’on y joue le bravache; pour brider cet animal, il faut de la ruse, rien que de la ruse si vous voulez me croire (*Crapauds*, 172-3).

Monénembo’s aim is to reveal that the same is true of restraining the beast of dictatorship.

Imagination

To resist the insidious spread of those tentacles of violent domination described above, subjects must territorialise and reterritorialize this in between space in imaginative ways. Karlström finds this positive element of a political imaginary missing from Mbembe’s work but in Monénembo’s writing the creative aspect of resistance emerges in a number of ways.⁹³ In *Écailles* Samba seems to inhabit more than one world, marked out since birth as somehow other worldly, ‘il nous glaçait

⁹² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 188.

⁹³ ‘There is no evidence of an autonomous collective political imagination – of substantive aspirations as to what a legitimately constructed state could be and do *for* its subjects if properly attuned to their needs.’ Karlström, ‘On the Aesthetics and Dialogics of Power’, p. 63.

le sang avec ses yeux qui regardaient un autre monde' (*Écailles*, 36).

Monénembo's inclusion of the supernatural, particularly via the character of Sibé (who relates the previous quotation), gestures to the imaginative potential embodied by nomadic subjects. Mbembe suggests that the discourse of power 'drives [its targets] into the realms of fantasy', but the agency Monénembo writes into his subjects has them opt for rather than retreat to these imaginative worlds.⁹⁴ Such application of imagination reminds us of the trickster figure from traditional folk tales who employs flexibility and cunning to turn circumstances to his advantage.⁹⁵ For Braidotti this borrowing of energy from elsewhere can lead to an enactment of potential that makes a difference to the (politically oppressive) present: 'borrow energy from a possible future to act here and now, to make a difference in a system which does not want you to have energy'.⁹⁶ Thus we can see in characters' use of their imagination (to dream of that possible future) the agency which could be used for political resistance, a hint of what the embodied self is capable of.⁹⁷ Though Monénembo omits details of the detainees' prison years – Daouda is not heard of again, and 'Bandiougou et Samba préféreront ne pas nous raconter' (*Écailles*, 141) – we can imagine the solace found in psychological and imaginative agency for those who are incarcerated with all other freedom stripped away.⁹⁸ Faustin in *L'Aîné* for example thrives on fabricating narratives in prison, and Leda, trapped in a disabled body in Pelourinho similarly exercises the reach of her mind in her narratives. Partha Chatterjee highlights that the practices of those

⁹⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 118.

⁹⁵ Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 36.

⁹⁶ Rosi Braidotti 'Thinking as a Nomadic Subject', Lecture (Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, 7 October 2014).

⁹⁷ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Protest in prison can consist of collective tapping of meal tins or cell bars, for example. Scott, p. 152.

who transgress the strict lines of legality must be given attention, even if they do not fit the mould.⁹⁹

Diversion also emerges in irony. In *Crapauds* the friends who gather together speak with disparaging brevity about those in power, and observe the violence of the everyday with humorous critical distance:

J'ai parlé, et vous vous en doutez sûrement, de notre cher président,
bienfaiteur suprême de vous et de moi, ardent défenseur de la cause
sacrée, notre leader bien-aimé, Sâ Matrak... Il faut tuer cette vermine,
cette cohorte de sangsues, avant qu'il ne soit trop tard (*Crapauds*, 56-
7).

The sarcastic repetition of those same self-attributed titles mentioned above in my discussion of the mythmaking dictator figures is spat out here as a vehicle for Monénembo's pointed critique:

There is no official policy which is not immediately deciphered in the
back streets, no slogan which is not straightaway parodied, no speech
which is not subjected to an acid bath of derision, no rally which does
not resound with hollow laughter.¹⁰⁰

Where Deeriye in *Close Sesame* describes Somalia as 'a stage where the Grandest Actor performs in front of an applauding audience that should be booing him', Monénembo reveals the mocking that happens behind the scenes.¹⁰¹ As Josaphat Kubayanda captures, 'the dictator cannot afford to be laughed at, whereas the

⁹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 252.

¹⁰¹ Nuruddin Farah, *Close Sesame*, (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992), p. 234.

people need laughter as an antidote to the pain inflicted by the dictator'.¹⁰² Such derision continually undermines the discourse of those on stage.

Characters' creativity in formulating their own public discourses to manipulate those seeking to control them is evident. Public space has to be a place of submission and accordance with the dictator, and mobile subjects who observe from the shadowy wings know best how to act and speak on that stage. These techniques of concealment require an experimental spirit and a capacity to test and exploit the loopholes, ambiguities, silences and lapses available to you:

Monénembo's subjects are experts at this.¹⁰³ Scott lists feigning submission amongst the art of resistance, and this can be found in the superficial deference enacted by characters seeking to placate the dictator figures and quickly divert their attention. Rather than conformity it consists of successful self-misrepresentation in a reappropriation of space and power.¹⁰⁴ Bayart describes these techniques of evasion and pretence as 'chameleon's footsteps'.¹⁰⁵ Though this storytelling to divert is more prevalent in Monénembo's other texts, there are still glimpses here. In Chapter Three we will see how these imaginary worlds become alternative spaces to inhabit, within storytelling practices which are creative and productive. I argue for example that Faustin in *L'Aîné* echoes Camus' Meursault in his remorseless humour, and Josias Semujanga has suggested the same.¹⁰⁶ In Chapter Four of this thesis, retrospective narratives inflect memory with the creative perspectives induced by exile. These practices certainly form part of the débrouillardise which marks out Monénembo's underdogs. This street-wisdom is the same as that passed from Ardo to Binguel in *Cinéma*, best learned from a well-situated street-side spot from which they can watch the world go by. In a nomadic

¹⁰² Josaphat Kubayanda, 'Unfinished Business: Dictatorial Literature of Post-Independence Latin America and Africa', *Research in African Literatures* 28:4 (1997), 38-53, (p. 41).

¹⁰³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁶ Josias Semujanga, *Le génocide, sujet de fiction* (Québec: Nota bene, 2008), p. 67.

reworking of the Bildungroman, Monénembo's self-educating subjects are driven into precarious journeys, along which they share both the oppression and the acquired *débrouillard* mindset with a number of others.

Togetherness

Though their responses can be individual, the awareness (of the dominant's performances and schemes, of their own agency) is communal. As I argue throughout the thesis, this is made evident by Monénembo through an inscription across his whole oeuvre of a collective nomadic imaginary. In these dictatorship novels it emerges in collaborative resistance as characters work together to enact agency in resistance to the many faceted, domineering schemes of the dictatorship. Thus Oumou and Samba's relationship resists the divisive methods of the dictatorship which succeed in separating Râhi and Daouda.¹⁰⁷ And in the last third of *Crapauds*, Râhi is rescued from her isolation into community with Kandia and those who gather at Paradis, a bar. Although weighed down by the detritus and suffering of life within the dictatorship, it is as though the energy which emerges from them being together cannot be quashed. 'Ici, la vie coulait sans demander son reste; qui pouvait dire si elle coulait en source joyeuse ou en égout, parfois honteux de faire surface?' (*Crapauds*, 156). These examples are more than acts of resistance punctuating an otherwise passive existence: they are sets of practices which indicate a nomadic imaginary. Common tendencies in behaviour indicate a kind of shared, coded thought, which we see evidenced right across Monénembo's work. In Chapter One we saw how movement is in the very cultural core of Peul people, and how Olivier de Sanderval appropriated mobile and wily practices to become Peul himself. Here it is not necessarily a physical mobility which signals the presence of a common imaginary, but rather a manner of responding to political

¹⁰⁷ 'Central to [dictators'] continued grip on power...is disinformation and strategies that divide the population', Joseph Gugler, 'African Literary Comment on Dictators: Wole Soyinka's Plays and Nuruddin Farah's Novels', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26:1 (1988), 171-177, (p. 173).

oppression. In Chapters Three and Four I trace how the same imaginary emerges in different forms. But in each case, the nomadic social imaginary shows itself to be both communal and grounded.

By drawing attention to Monénembo's grounded subjects I am emphasising both Certeau's notion of productive agents of space and Braidotti's commitment to locatedness. The novelist's characters are always located in the hardship of a specific geopolitical reality, and I reiterate that this is a large part of what makes these two novels his most explicit critique of Touré's Guinea. Part of his reasoning in tying them so closely to the spaces they inhabit, however, is to reveal what agency they possess to condition those spaces. It is worth noting that the markers of instability listed earlier in this chapter become sources of solidarity. It still stands that the chain of violence is self-perpetuating, but Monénembo's underdogs meet each emergence, each strike of the octopus' tentacles, face on with awareness and agency. The shared experiences of uncertainty via poverty, hunger, thirst, violence and crime lead survivor characters to gather in particular places: seeking safety and nourishment but also strength in numbers.

Spaces of dissent

Recalling Scott's quotation from above where he describes resistance as 'down-to-earth', it is important to note that where these forms of surreptitious resistance might be thought of as elementary, in fact their groundedness renders them the grassroots foundations on which more elaborate political action can be established. Their power comes in their being 'down-to-earth'.¹⁰⁸ The subjects' agency is dependent on and manifested in particular locations, 'it depends in part on where it is located, how it occupies its places within specific apparatuses, and how it moves

¹⁰⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 201.

within and between them'.¹⁰⁹ Far from the lofty airs and performed quasi-divinity of the dictator figures, those who artfully enact resistance are grounded in the unsentimental everyday. For Braidotti, locatedness is vital. Her interpretation of nomadic being is about enacting power right here, right now, and engaged action in particular geopolitical locations. This always requires the intervention of others (togetherness), since a location is 'a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatiotemporal territory'.¹¹⁰ As Scott describes, 'it is in this no-man's-land of feints, small attacks, probings to find weaknesses, and not in the rare frontal assault, that the ordinary battlefield lies'.¹¹¹ When underdogs gather, their awareness is heightened by the concentration of those gathered in the same circumstances. But the very strength of their *potentia* is also accentuated as they meet in uniquely private spaces of dissent. Since the public space must be a place of accordance with the dictator, there must be private spaces where a counter-discourse can be elaborated. Importantly, these sites do not have to be physical locations. Spaces of dissent can be inhabited linguistically when subjects use a code which is opaque to the ruler, such as the child play and filmic impersonations in *Cinéma*.¹¹² The dominated subjects must to some degree lie low, and carve out their own spaces where they can experience dignity and justice.¹¹³ These sites are collectively inhabited, and characterised by mutuality; the hierarchy imposed on the public space does not apply here, and subjects are insulated, albeit temporarily, from control and surveillance from above.¹¹⁴ Indeed the site which recurs the most in Monénembo's writing and that of his contemporary dictatorship novelists, and fits these criteria, is the bar.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence Grossberg, 'Wandering audiences, nomadic critics', *Cultural Studies*, 2 (1988), 377-91 (p. 384).

¹¹⁰ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 16.

¹¹¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 193.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

The bar is a primary locus in many of Monénembo's texts, along with, among others Nganang's *Temps de chien*, Alain Mabanckou's *Verre cassé*, and N'gũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the crow*. In the early stages of *Crapauds* Diouldé and his friends gather at *L'ombre du cocotier* where they joke around and have a good time (*Crapauds*, 35). Later the meeting place is *Paradis*, an escape from the shadows of the *Tombeau* and a seat for solidarity (150). In *Écailles*, the significance of *Chez Ngaoulo* is conveyed from the start:

Je ne saurais perdre le souvenir de ce relais providentiel autant que
néfaste où tout arrive et d'où tout repart: tous les visages de l'homme,
toutes les figures du destin. *Chez Ngaoulo* ne fut pas un cabaret
comme un autre, mais plutôt une espèce de lieu saint plein d'ironie,
passage obligé des itinéraires les plus fortuits, refuge prédestiné des
âmes les plus incurablement vagabondes (14).

Attaching such importance to specific places, Monénembo moves beyond the nationalist narratives of the dictator figures he critiques. The author also avoids the danger flagged up by Braidotti and others, of depicting nomad subjects as timeless, free-spirited subjects floating unattached to any place. The ultimate purpose of using nomadic subjectivity as an analytic tool, for Braidotti, is 'to compose significant sites for reconfiguring modes of belonging and political practice'.¹¹⁵ This is precisely what Monénembo's bars constitute. They are private spaces for strengthening togetherness and awareness, and thus act as a host and springboard for resistance.

An alternative home, which the French conveys aptly with 'chez', is to be found in the bar, which becomes the point of assembly for local subordinates driven out of the oppressed public space. The bar facilitates the circulation of people and

¹¹⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 11.

knowledge necessary for resistance, and just as the dictator exploits his intimate connections, so it is important for the dominated to know the right people. Banished though his subjects may be, Monénembo writes their resistance as contingent on this enforced alterity. It is in the homely space of N'gâ Bountou's *Paradis* that Kandia, Râhi and others establish the strong sense of togetherness which subsequently empowers them to escape the city. 'Nous, nous l'appelions N'gâ, tout simplement. En contrepartie, nous étions ses enfants. Avec ou sans le rond, nous étions toujours les bienvenus' (*Crapauds*, 151). This reappropriation of familial vocabulary, out of the twisted clutches of the treacherous dictatorship, is powerful; and indeed it is out of this safety that they are able to revolt. Parental figures (Ngaoulo, N'gâ Bountou, Hélène) stand in to support and provide for vulnerable characters. This aspect of community, I would argue, is a necessary condition of hidden transcripts, which are formed dynamically and collaboratively. In the same way that narrative is dialogic and communal in *Tribu* (see next chapter), so resistance is formulated in this group setting.

Indicative of Monénembo's aesthetics, the bar is a place of exchange. The bar is always central to action and narrative, and has protagonist narrators observe, listen, and learn, acquiring the streetwise knowledge which feeds into *débrouillard* practice. Like Nganang's dog narrator in *Temps de chien*, the narrator who opens *Écailles*, Koulloun, is a regular at the bar. He is perhaps not as lucid as the former though, since he drinks almost constantly, adding an extra grogginess to the already enigmatic tale. In spite of this, the bar is the place where truth is revealed and stories unfold. As he sits listening, Bandiougou, his tongue loosened with drink, eventually tells the story we read, of Cousin Samba, covered in shadows (*Écailles*, 27). Similarly, in *Attiéké* it is in the bar that plays host both to the joy of community and the jarring uncovering of past secrets. Alcohol is the catalyst for confession which triggers the novel's fatal conclusion. *Pelourinho*, another story

part narrated under the influence, is inflected with ‘des oublis, des affabulations, des élucubrations et des à-peu-près’ so that the collective posthumous biography is established as if on shaky legs and with clouded vision.¹¹⁶ Clearly the latter text reminds us once again of the volatility heightened by alcohol, particularly when we recall Escritore’s cousins drunkenly mistaking him for a rich tourist they attack and kill. Drink initiates utterings of the unspeakable, and appropriately muddles such utterings as if to account for the complex and clouded contours of power which are so difficult to speak of.

The bar is the place people want to be. The atmosphere of freedom and joviality encouraged by alcohol, the transmission of popular culture (more colourful and varied than those stories or myths permitted and promulgated by official decrees) and the teasing and light-heartedness shared between friends is an opted-for resistance to the depression of the outside world. Koulloun confirms this deliberate choice: ‘nous nous terrâmes *Chez Ngaoulo* pour de bon, trouvant dans les circonstances une bonne opportunité pour nous consoler au moyen de l’alcool’ (*Écailles*, 175). The free flow of alcohol is a counter-narrative to the poverty suffered outside of the bar, often also manifesting the resourcefulness and generosity of the landlord or landlady. ‘Notre bon Ngaoulo avait veillé à nous en procurer sans discontinuer en dépit de la guerre. Ngaoulo pouvait vous dénicher un cageot de bière fraîche en fouillant une dune du Kalahari!’ (175). The quality of the alcohol may not be the best, served ‘dans un décor miteux’ (14), but the experience is more authentic than the ministry soirées which scream of excess and imitated luxury (*Crapauds*, 38-40).

¹¹⁶ Bernard De Meyer and Papa Samba Diop, eds. ‘Tierno Monénembo et le roman: Histoire, exil, écriture’, *Littératures et cultures francophones hors d’Europe* 8 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), p 145.

Scott underlines that these sites have to be won, cleared, built and defended; they are not merely the space leftover by domination.¹¹⁷ The ways they are inhabited contribute to the ongoing processes of reterritorialisation within the space of the dictatorship. Particular sites' significance are represented in the books by attempts to abolish or penetrate them, showing that the power holder understands some of their importance and feels threatened. For readers, the bar fixes our attention on localised spaces of dissent, following Monénembo's aim to magnify representation beyond the space of the nation or continent, grounding his narratives in the everyday of specific, contested locations.

The potential for rooted community and creativity is quashed at the end of *Écailles* as the bar stands empty and Koulloun lies almost lifeless in a deserted Kolisoko (193). At the conclusion of *Crapauds*, *Paradis* has been razed to the ground by the authorities (160). However, its work as a catalyst for resistance has been sufficient since the characters are outside of the city, watching the rising sun. Thus Monénembo concludes that though crucial, the bar (or any other space of dissent) need not be permanent. The *potentia* exploited and enacted by nomadic subjects is transferrable and not limited to a fixed location. Rather, the bar as a space can be a temporary means for consciousness-raising and collaboration: a private space where discourses of dissent can be formulated via storytelling emboldened by cheap or free drink. The bar's name *Paradis*, uttered with hopeful delight by those who frequent it, refers to the possibility it represents, but since that possibility is not concrete, it is difficult to quash. It is a space of rallying engagement and action, as Kandia elaborates, 'ce que je voulais c'était appeler, gueuler fort pour que tous viennent unir les voix et les poings pour assommer le passé et polir l'avenir' (159). And that space, subject to metamorphosis and mobility, will in its temporariness

¹¹⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 123.

evade the schemes of domination just like the nomad subjects who rusefully inhabit it.

Conclusion

The space depicted in Monénembo's dictatorship novels is one that is perpetually contested in practices of reterritorialisation, on the part of the dominant *and*, unbeknownst to the former, on the part of the dominated as well. The unsteady terrain of instability, characterised by violence which emerges in multiple forms, is the stage on which dictator figures parade their power, claiming to be at once omnipotent and magnanimous. The downtrodden, however, see through their myths of unity and stability, gaining lucid awareness by being perpetually on the move, lurking in the shadows to tune in to the incongruent discourses of the dictator figures. Their own hidden discourses emerge out of shared awareness and this is one manifestation of their common nomadic imaginary. The power of these more clandestine forms of defiance lies in their low-key nature: they effectively renegotiate power relations by remaining unobtrusive.

In this negotiation of space, mobility plays a vital role. The emergences of violent control spread like the creeping limbs of an octopus to disrupt any sense of safety or stability. Resistance, in response, consists of predicting and evading those movements, dodging their advances, and imaginatively contesting space as and when is possible. Where the mobility highlighted in the previous chapter was largely physical, following ethnic Peul nomads, this flagged up significant elements to analyse, as regards occupation of space and use of narrative, in this more political and psychological series of movements. In the face of extreme oppression, and the looming threat of violence and death, the dominated apply a wily *débrouillardise* and enact their *potentia* through collaborative agency. Monénembo's protagonists and narrators territorialise in ever-mobile ways,

revealing the hidden, in-between spaces of these cities in narratives which undercut the claimed authority of those in control. By relegating the importance of superficial signs of power and benevolence, these characters act as a vehicle for the author to critique the violent dictatorship of Sékou Touré. At the same time, Monénembo represents the supposed underdogs as nomad subjects who enact agency to condition and control the (hidden, changing) spaces they inhabit.

What we conclude is that dictatorship and resistance cannot be viewed separately, or as a distinct binary, since they are dynamically interdependent. As one moves, the other responds to it; as one imposes restrictions on space, the other moves around and beneath them. The relevance of this dialogic engagement with discourse will become clearer in the next chapter in my discussion of *Tribu*.

Karlström highlights such construction of socio-political space, and outlines the reciprocal influences of the official-popular interface.¹¹⁸ The art of resistance is conditioned by the practices of domination, and vice versa. Both are multiple and both are mobile, and both contribute to the dynamic formation of the state.¹¹⁹

Chatterjee outlines the entanglement of elite and subaltern politics in his book *The Politics of the Governed*, arguing for a wider consideration of more varied arenas of political mobilisation.¹²⁰ I argue that this more comprehensive focus should come through magnifying our perspective on local, specific sites rather than official and national narratives of domination and resistance. As we follow Monénembo's underdog subjects we see them as empowered agents who shape space with their steps and diversions.¹²¹ Certain readings of sovereignty can risk overlooking resistance but using a framework like Nganang's metonymic chain of violence helps unravel domination as complex and multifaceted practices which can and are contested in varied, surreptitious ways. Moreover, an attention to

¹¹⁸ Karlström, p. 64.

¹¹⁹ Bayart, *The State in Africa*, p. 210.

¹²⁰ Chatterjee, p. 47.

¹²¹ Certeau, *L'Art du quotidien*, p. 148.

language, aided by revealing the fluidity of and disparity between public and hidden transcripts, proves the extent to which there is room to manoeuvre.

Lastly, it is in seeing subjects as *débrouillard* negotiators, we become aware of how much power lies in the hands of the underdogs. Because of their shared consciousness and agency, they thrive on instability and are capable of beating the dominant at their own game, like at the end of *Crapauds* when the group ‘s’était glissé comme un serpent’ and escape (161). In imitating the creeping territorialisation of the dictator figures, the dominated reinvent the very practices aimed at controlling them. Since they are more wily and wise (indicated by Monénembo’s serpent metaphor, as opposed to the octopus epithet he attributes to the dictatorship) they usurp that control and slither away to freedom, knowingly exploiting both language and silence. This does not mean we have a naïve or ignorant expectation for what the dominated can achieve. I am not arguing that nomadic subjects will necessarily overthrow an autocrat, or that his inclement oppression will end. What this kind of reading does alert us to is the perpetual interdependence of domination and resistance, and the nature of space as ongoingly negotiated and contested.¹²² Their mutual conditioning is clear: since nomad subjects form their resistance on knowledge of the dominant’s practices, when he changes tactics, so will they. It ensures an awareness of the creative potential of nomadic subjects to learn, to evade, to collaborate, to resist, and, also to narrate, which is what we turn to now in the next chapter.

¹²² Chatterjee, p. 74.

Chapter Three: Survivors and Storytelling

***L'Ainé des orphelins* (2000), *Cinéma* (1997) and *La Tribu des gonzesses* (2006)**

Introduction

This chapter addresses three of Monénembo's texts: *L'Ainé des orphelins*, *Cinéma*, and *La Tribu des gonzesses*. Whilst continuing to reveal the detritus of the postcolony (Nganang),¹ Monénembo centralises storytelling to convey his recasting of African subjects as nomadic *débrouillards*. In this chapter, a focus on narrativity helps elucidate Monénembo's twofold project: providing representations of renewed subjectivity to challenge existing paradigms; and a critique of postcolonial politics through a display of its concrete and problematic effects. It is the high degree of narrativity in these characters' ways of being which is both emblematic of and inherent to their postcolonial agency and territorialising. As we recall from the introduction to the thesis, Mbembe's appeal for a renewed African subjectivity requires a move out of existing historicist paradigms and into heightened self-reflexivity and autonomy from Eurocentric conceptualisations of identity. Where the latter are concerned with asserting alterity, these ways of operating are more helpfully informed by Michel de Certeau's *alteration*; that is, where spaces and subjects are mutually and repeatedly conditioned through encounters. Mbembe calls for self-writing which attends to spatial, political, and cultural categories as well as to origins, and which accounts for 'disparate, intersecting practices of the self',² thus attending to both the plural and communal nature of such practices. His focus on the 'mouvement tourbillonnaire' which characterises modern Africa always sees subjects as mobile, and thus necessitates

¹ Patrice Nganang, *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine* (Paris: Homnisphères, 2007), p. 19.

² Achille Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', *Public Culture*, 14:1 (2002) 239-273 (p. 272).

self-writing that is dynamic and complex.³ Generally it is Monénembo's representation of nomadic subjects, mobile yet grounded in African experience of *la rue*, which achieves this, though in Chapter One we also saw how a re-reading of history can emphasise African agency in the place of passivity. Here we see Monénembo choose the medium of storytelling to show just such self-writing practices in progress.

A focus on storytelling necessarily moves away from Eurocentric conceptualisations of the African subject and towards oral narratives more grounded in contemporary African experience. Ursula Baumgardt and Jean Derive argue that, for African literature, it is 'l'un des ferments de sa spécificité identitaire' and must form an integral part of any study, allowing for the complex and varied relationships which exist between literature and orality.⁴ In Monénembo's writing, the characters' very ways of being are notably characterised by practices of self-writing, or self-telling. Focussing on storytelling thus as an indicator and furnisher of subjectivity draws us to connect any concept of the self, the community, and the nation with narrative practices. This in turn wrests our attention on the interface between fiction and truth, so pertinent to questions of testimony, creativity, explicit or subtle performances within everyday life and politics: all areas explored in this chapter. Equally, storytelling itself constitutes much of the ruse of Monénembo's action: where characters are agents who condition the space they inhabit, storytelling is almost always central to this.

Thus where Chapter Two focussed on the physical manifestations of nationalist dictatorship and the spatial practices through which nomad protagonists resist it, this chapter addresses the *débrouillard* narrative practices of complex subjects. In

³ Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: Découverte, 2010), p. 203.

⁴ Ursula Baumgardt and Jean Derive, *Littérature africaine et oralité* (Paris: Karthala, 2013), p. 5.

these three texts characters experience a shared present where the everyday is affected by pain and suffering, and yet Monénembo proves that within this, storytelling establishes both more comprehensive senses of identity and more hospitable space in which these can be received. And so the author continues to write a renewed African subjectivity, through series of self-writing and, as it were here, self-telling. The storytelling described here contributes to and is affected by a collective imaginary, which readies the narrators for negotiating, surviving and innovating. Different modes of storytelling as ruse will be helpfully elucidated in this chapter via Diagne, who sees the spoken word not only as giving a specific quality to ‘des systèmes des représentations et de comportements liés au contexte’, but as determining a specific way of thinking: what he terms ‘la raison orale’.⁵ Thus by examining storytelling in Monénembo’s novelistic and dramatized texts we see that it, along with the physical use of space, can indicate a nomadic mindset which is primed for ruse. Narrative practice is seen to be inherently creative, and not limited to reactionary contexts of resistance. The roles of imagination and innovation reveal a complex interface between truth and fiction, which is addressed here via examples of commemorative, testimony, and performance writing. Finally, storytelling is proved to be productive in the way it shapes space via *alteration*. For Certeau, alteration is what must occur both for the observer and the observed object in cultural study: by allowing something to roam, to wander out of a conceptual frame in which it has been fixed, both that object and its viewer must shift.⁶ I extend this to the encounter between stories and the spaces in which they are told, both physical and social. In other words, I show how the sharing of stories which are personal and/or painful, agency on the part of the narrator, and adjustments in the reader-audience make room for difference at multiple narrative levels, resulting in more accommodating cultural and political space overall. This

⁵ Mamoussé Diagne, *Critique de la raison orale* (Paris: Karthala, 2005), p. 17.

⁶ Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 7.

transformative dimension of telling stories is on display in each of the texts: varyingly celebrated or criticised by Monénembo according to whose power exercises it for what purpose.

Simultaneously, Monénembo's narrating subjects reveal a postcolonial world rife with problems and in this way maintain the author's dual focus on subjectivity and space. His critique of both European and African politics continues with a pointed display of fractured and precarious contexts whose inhabitants narrate their way around a number of persistent problems: financial poverty, homelessness, unemployment, religious tension. Albeit free from the weight of dictatorship seen in Chapter Two, the focus is largely sustained on *la rue* and the concreteness of suffering loss and danger is evident.

I approach this argument via a discussion of the commemorative literary project 'Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire' which questions the role played by dominant discourses in silencing real stories of pain and in perpetuating homogenised narratives of victimhood. Monénembo's unique contribution to the project, *L'Ainé des orphelins*, sees an adolescent protagonist negotiate his survival of the tragic events of 1994, and is read in this instance as an example of Nganang's *écriture post-génocide*. After this, the chapter proceeds with a consideration of storytelling as performance. *Cinéma* and *La Tribu des gonzesses* are Monénembo's most dramatized texts, and their internal performances helpfully elucidate the physical, imaginative and communal aspects of storytelling whilst readily problematizing (African) postcolonial experience in Guinea and France respectively. What we see in concentrating on personalised storytelling in these texts is that they stand as examples of the public and collaborative constitution of narrative and identity within precarious and changing contexts, and create space for dialogue in a way that is far more productive (ie. producing change in people and space) than larger (nationalist) narratives. In turn, a fuller picture of African

subjects is established: one that emphasises creative narrative agency which is self-conscious and not always blameless.

In short the main aim for this chapter is to show how Monénembo's centralisation of storytelling reveals the agency of African subjects amidst contexts of hardship and suffering. Unlike those in positions of power, who employ stories to dominate and deceive, Monénembo's protagonists seem more physically linked to their stories, which are grounded in *la rue*, full-bodied rather than façades, and as mobile as their narrators. In the postcolonial context, the writing of previously unheard voices in literature stands as a powerful move in response to their prior suppression. In expressing such a high degree of narrativity, Monénembo highlights how the agency of these postcolonial subjects works to shape their various spaces, directly and indirectly (through the responses of those who hear such stories). This can be seen as a key expression of the nomadic mindset Monénembo depicts throughout his oeuvre, and will be described later in a number of recurring characteristics from *Tribu* and *Cinéma* but initially in the context of post-genocide writing. For such an exploration of space-shaping agency, it is appropriate to use a text in which the power of literature to shape time and space is explicitly celebrated:

La prendre au sérieux signifie donc moins analyser l'immanence des textes, ou leur relation au fait social, que d'écouter le raisonnement divers des questions des rues 'de chez nous' dans le cœur des œuvres; de voir comment celles-ci racontent, de texte en texte, de livre en livre, une aventure tumultueuse de l'idée, et ainsi élaborent autant une géographie qu'une histoire idéales.⁷

⁷ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 17.

Nganang's manifesto centres on African literature as the source and reflection of contemporary African thought.

Rwanda

Nganang's *écriture post-génocide*

In his 2007 *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine* (which itself stands in provocative juxtaposition with the *littérature-monde* manifesto of the same year⁸) Nganang condemns the all too patient and Eurocentric trajectory of African philosophy which lasted until the genocide which took place in Rwanda in 1994. In his manifesto which traces an aesthetic for recent African literature, he argues that African thought, and therefore the literature which shapes and conveys it, cannot be the same after such a public and spectacular tragedy. Aligning himself with Achille Mbembe, Nganang sees the genocide as the starting point for a new assumption of African autonomy. It is only from a place of recognising the crumbled failure of the two traditions of radicalism and nativism that the African subject can free itself from the binds of victimisation and essentialism. Nganang sees Mbembe as unique in achieving this, and thus best-placed to signal the breakaway from retrospective and unreflective conceptions of the African subject which is urgent and necessary. For Nganang, the answer comes in a renewed subjectivity to be found in 'la rue' (his main reference point for authentic experience of contemporary urban Africa), where the primary actors tend to be survivors who knowingly move through 'un espace infini de possibilités qui naissent du désordre'.⁹ The philosopher uses the city streets as the foundational setting for his own fictional work, and describes its presence in the writing of several others including Nuruddin Farah and Ben Okri.¹⁰ We of course find the

⁸ Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud and Eva Almassy, *Pour une littérature-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

⁹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 45, p. 16, p. 265.

¹⁰ See for example *Temps du chien* by Nganang, *Maps, Secrets and Gifts* by Farah, and *Dangerous Love* by Okri.

same in Monénembo's corpus, and in others' contributions to post-genocide writing.

2014 marked twenty years since the genocide in Rwanda where almost one million people were killed in one hundred days.¹¹ In 1998, ten African writers visited Kigali as part of a collaborative literary project which was initiated by Nocky Djedanoum and Maïmouna Coulibaly in conjunction with Fest' Africa (an annual festival held in France). The project, 'Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire', would eventually see ten texts published, forming a kind of dynamic literary space in and from which to remember and interrogate the tragic events of 1994.¹² Of the project, Catherine Coquio asks, 'si ces expressions mémorielles relèvent d'un travail du deuil réel, ou si elles ne sont pas parfois susceptibles de lui faire écran?'.¹³ Although the texts tackle the highly complex aestheticisation of trauma, and highlight its ultimate intractability, Coquio's question is illustrative of the all too narrow attention awarded to this project in its critical reception. It was not the primary aim of the project's instigators to share any authentic or symbolic experience of grief with those who lived through the genocide; they rather commit to writing to show that 'Africa is committed to Africa'.¹⁴ I suggest rather that the project's uniqueness, and in particular its inherent postcolonial critique through addressing the pain and guilt in survivor subjects, reveals far more of its value. Although Nganang is dismissive of the project, I argue specifically that its texts form an important initial example of the writing his manifesto describes. The opening section of Nganang's *Manifeste* places the genocide in Rwanda as marking the need for a new, pre-emptive vocation for African literature in its

¹¹ At the time of writing this chapter, I noted a wave of commemorative activity, including conferences (SFPS November 2014), seminar series (University of Leicester), and widespread media attention.

¹² Texts written for the project are marked with an asterisk in the bibliography.

¹³ Catherine Coquio, *Rwanda: le réel et les récits* (Paris: Belin, 2004) p. 745.

¹⁴ Alexandre Dauge-Roth, *Writing and Filming the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 90.

aftermath. He makes clear that the genocide in Rwanda was neither original nor unexpected, but rather a repetition of the same thing: ‘l’explosion au présent, devant le visage du monde d’une téléologie de la violence qui pour le continent africain a le visage de sa modernité’.¹⁵ Of course we have already seen evidence of this emergence in the previous chapter, and Mbembe also underscores violence as a characteristic of modern African experience.¹⁶ Nganang places the 1994 genocide among a list of others, yet sets it apart as the epitome of horror and unique in its spectacular nature. For Nganang what renders it a turning point in modern history is the way it stands as a wakeup call to African thinkers. Typical of the manifesto’s provocative tone, he writes that the genocide is a smack in the face for African thinkers, asleep at the time of the killings, ‘gifle dont l’écho résonne encore avec éclat dans la profondeur de toute la bibliothèque africaine’.¹⁷ Malian writer Manthia Diawara agrees that silence around the genocide shows the death of the public intellectual in Africa and argues that this comes as a consequence not only of the domination of Western media voices (more generally in commenting on Africa) but also as a result of post-independence dictatorial regimes (like that in *Les Crapauds-brousse*) driving the centre of Francophone thought back to Paris. What is more, he argues, such dormant apathy is a legacy of nationalist agendas which saw African intellectuals isolated from one another and rendered impossible any sense of collaborative African thinking.¹⁸ Not only does the Pan-African collaboration of the Fest-Africa project mark a different response, but each of these three causes is problematized in the project’s texts, making it a more significant and comprehensive contribution to post-genocide writing than Nganang gives it credit for.

¹⁵ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 29.

¹⁶ Mbembe, *Sortir*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 26.

¹⁸ Manthia Diawara, ‘African Literature and the Rwandan Exhibition’, *Africultures*, 1 May 2002 <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=5584>> [accessed 23 July 2014].

Thus Nganang condemns African thinkers for their soporific inaction. In the aftermath of a genocide, where fingers are pointing at Rwandans and others to call out ‘crimes by omission’, Nganang denounces their silence before the events, and is particularly critical of the dependence of African philosophy on European frameworks and its consequent unproductivity in Africa. He argues that African thinking and writing must now be defined ‘comme nécessairement post-génocide’.¹⁹ He urges African writers to wake up and commit to a forward-looking *engagement* which will pre-empt tragedy on the continent and render it impossible. I see this as a call to assume responsibility which is answered[/anticipated] by the writers of the Fest’Africa project whose work is a brave, necessary and exemplary early step towards literary engagement with the seemingly impossible (writing after genocide). Further, I argue that the very creativity on display in such texts signposts literature as uniquely able to render wider impossibilities possible (for example, for Nganang, African thinkers waking up and shaping politics).

Following a genocide where the seemingly impossible (inhumane murder of thousands of innocent people in a spectacularly violent onslaught) was made possible at shocking speed, such an inversion of imaginary and real is not only commendable but absolutely necessary – this need is expressed in the ‘devoir’ of the project’s title. Speaking on what he described as the exemplary reconciliation processes in post-genocide Rwanda, Wole Soyinka recently argued that Rwanda should be used as a paradigm for the whole continent, in the following way: in a nation brutalised by *unimaginable* events, successfully applied strategies are rendering the impossible (reconciliation) possible.²⁰ The *genocidaires* themselves inverted real and imaginary, resulting in extensive shock and disarray, as voiced by Monénembo’s protagonist: ‘depuis ces fameux *avènements*, tout fonctionne à l’envers’, (*L’Aîné*, 91). The only appropriate response in the face of such inhumane

¹⁹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 43, p. 27.

²⁰ Wole Soyinka, ‘Literature, the African Condition, and My Life’, Lecture (University of Oxford, 5 May 2014).

inversion seems to be further transpositions; and Nganang calls on African thinkers to work these out creatively and politically (as Soyinka does). In this sense, Soyinka brings the political reality of post-genocide Rwanda into line with Nganang's description of a new dawn for literature: out of the darkness of seemingly impossible horror, the genocide stands as 'l'aube de notre présent'.²¹ Evidently there is an urgent need, therefore, for the creation of space in which to imagine, transpose and challenge. 'Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire' provides an initial space for this kind of writing, through which Monénembo is ready to engage.

Global cry

Nganang labels this tragedy a new *philosophème* whose evidence is undeniable, ingrained and inscribed as it is in the conscience of today's culture.²² Like yeast, it brings growth, necessitating new thinking not only for the intellectuals of today's Africa but for people the world over. The genocide acts as a global wakeup call. Diawara's threefold analysis above highlights the implications for a *transnational* community to think afresh, and thus also corroborates Monénembo's wider project to renew African subjectivity in the world's eyes. The author's cry for the world to look afresh permeates his oeuvre, yet is loudest perhaps in an article published in *Le Monde* the month following the stadium massacre in Conakry on September 29th 2009. In 'La Guinée, cinquante ans d'indépendance et d'enfer' he decries the same sleepy ignorance that Mbembe and Nganang condemn in African thinkers.

'Le drame de mon pays ne doit pas rester sans visage, sans nom, sans sens, sans trace. Il doit gronder, enfler, et se soulever comme les ouragans de chez nous pour réveiller cette satanée "conscience

²¹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 28.

²² Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 26.

collective” si prompte à se voiler la face et à ronfler dès que l’odeur de la tragédie dépasse certaines frontières.’²³

The Fest’Africa project not only answers this call to look and see by creating a public space in which to display such tragedy, but causes the same cry to echo further, through inter-textual reverberations and then resonances beyond the project as a global Francophone readership has its eyes opened to the horror of the genocide.²⁴ Diop writes, ‘au moment de périr sous les coups, les suppliciés avaient crié. Personne n’avait voulu les entendre. L’écho de ces cris devait se prolonger le plus longtemps possible’.²⁵ The hope is that global space is infused with a greater sense of response-ability by reading these texts, in such a way that renders impossible the ignorant reactions narrated by Diop, when, citing François Mitterrand’s words from 1994, a ‘Vieillard’ remarks that ‘dans ces pays-là, un génocide ce n’est pas trop important’.²⁶

I argue that the participation of Monénembo and others in the Fest’Africa project places them within Nganang’s category of pre-emptive writers. The writers’ collaboration provides a platform from which African thinkers and the wider world see tragedy afresh (or perhaps for the first time), are altered, and respond by acting and thinking to prevent its repetition, and the repetition of ‘l’absence générale de réflexion, de pensée’.²⁷ More than that though, the very space of commemorative, critical, post-genocide writing is captured by these writers, and reworked to host a range of deeply personalised, painful, and problematizing texts in the place of

²³ Tierno Monénembo, ‘La Guinée, cinquante ans d’indépendance et d’enfer’, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2009.

²⁴ To date, three of the texts have been translated into English: those by Diop, Monénembo, and Tadjó. Though Nganang does not explore the choice of written language in his manifesto, French puts the project on a global stage (though of course the notion of any cohesive Francophone community is problematic), and certain authors refer directly to European texts by their choice of title (Tadjó recalling Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, and Rurangwa, Annette Wieviorka’s *Auschwitz, expliqué à ma fille*).

²⁵ Boubacar Boris Diop, *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (Paris: Zulma, 2011), p. 189.

²⁶ Diop, p. 228. This comment by François Mitterrand was reported by Patrick Saint-Exupéry in *Le Figaro* on 12 January 1998.

²⁷ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 53.

dominant homogenising narratives.

This alteration of literary space is in no way a straightforward process, and in fact can only be achieved by a number of tentative steps Nganang describes as necessary in this post-genocide writing.

In taking these steps, the writers display a number of elements set out by Nganang as characteristic of post-genocide writing. Grounded in *la rue*, they follow streetwise protagonists to reveal detritus and pain with biting realism and in their focus on guilt and narrativity, the texts also interrogate the African subject. Hence Monénembo's literary project is furthered both by complex re-casting of narrator-subjects, and by taking part in collaborative writing which in its heterogeneity provides a comprehensive representation of post-genocide Rwanda, and in its repeated themes critiques those responsible for such circumstances.

Tentative steps

Where Nganang is altogether dismissive of the endeavour, I argue that the project's texts model the necessarily bold and careful steps of his post-genocide writing.

They in no way shy away from the odour of death which haunts Kigali, and instead engage with the pain and detritus of the genocide's aftermath by remaining largely based in the streets. Without denying the testing terrain of writing after genocide, the narratives simultaneously make bold moves in creative writing to provide alternatives to dominant discourses on African subjects. Hence the project fulfils Nganang's requirement for tentative steps into the sphere of post-genocide writing: 'Tâter le terrain du matin qui découvre les centaines de milliers de morts du génocide au Rwanda pour la pensée africaine ne peut se faire qu'à petits pas: à pas risqués et douloureux.' The project's writers are hesitant, tardy, and implicated;

and these problems are consciously teased out through the texts.²⁸ More than this, in a persistent focus on self-conscious narrator-subjects and the danger and pain of *la rue*, these texts provide an acerbic critique of African and global responsibility.

There are dangers, in undertaking this post-genocide writing, of furthering dominant and homogenising (nationalist or Western media) narratives (which might suggest for example that all Africans are victims, or all African conflict is ‘tribal’ warfare, or that everyone’s suffering is the same) and/or staying rooted in the identitarian trajectories historically found in African thought (called out as soporific by Nganang).²⁹ However, the project’s texts steer well clear of these risks and further, are positioned in counterpoint to the *génocidaires’* own homogenising aims which sought the complete destruction of any ‘other’. One of the prolonged tragedies in Rwanda was that the homogenising aims of the genocide were inevitably continued in its aftermath. Due to the scale of suffering, individuality could not be accounted for. Some sense of the *devoir* of post-genocide writing is filled then in accounting for ‘the individual experiences of survivors and the singularity of their suffering’, in what Zoe Norridge describes as ‘a gesture of resistance to the ideology underpinning genocide’.³⁰ No single story could achieve this, and the varied and painful nature of personalised stories conveyed by the Fest’Africa texts gives value to the individual and thus responds powerfully after the genocide which sought to erase any concept of the personal in its aim to annihilate a whole people. In its publicity, the project shouts the same wakeup call Nganang advocates, but it stands apart from single novelistic endeavours, or oft-skimmed-over media reports to express the heterogeneity of personal experience.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 49-50. ‘Mais seulement, toute action qui vient après le génocide n’est-elle pas condamnée à être tatillonne ? Toute écriture post-génocide aussi peut-elle être autre chose que tardive ? Le plus difficile pour la philosophie africaine sera toujours d’assumer sa propre condamnation à l’absence et au retard devant le génocide...’

²⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁰ Zoe Norridge, *Perceiving pain in African literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 135 and p. 2.

In its plurality, the project refuses to convey trauma through straightforward narratives which simply piece together the fragments of a formerly coherent whole.

As genocide and pain are about removing agency, storytelling works to embody agency through language. The Rwanda literary project provides an initial space for this, and serves to explore and express suffering in a number of ways. In Diop's novel *Murambi: le livre des ossements* the reader journeys with one of the protagonists around different (real) sites commemorating the crimes of the genocide. The torture victims were subjected to is described in raw detail and cadavers are on display in what is an almost clinical post-mortem. The most shocking description comes in a tour of Nyamata church:

'La jeune femme avait la tête repoussée en arrière et le hurlement que lui avait arraché la douleur s'était figé sur son visage encore grimaçant. Ses magnifiques tresses étaient en désordre et ses jambes largement écartées. Un pieu – en bois ou en fer, Cornelius ne savait pas, il était trop choqué pour s'en soucier – était resté enfoncé dans son vagin.'³¹

As well as giving some idea of the sheer numbers of murdered victims by showing cases of bones, the individual victims are given background stories, names and details, as in a museum. This is different from global media and humanitarian narratives which list numbers and crowds but leave little room for personal accounts, and foregrounds pain in concrete details to render its horror both rightly shocking and somewhat intelligible. In Véronique Tadjo's text, *L'Ombre d'Imana*, the presence of death is conveyed at once less crudely and in a more permeating way. 'Les ruelles de la ville étaient pleines d'esprits qui circulaient, qui tourbillonnaient dans l'air étouffant. Ils côtoyaient les êtres, montaient sur leur dos,

³¹ Diop, p.99.

marchaient avec eux, dansaient autour d’eux, les suivaient à travers les ruelles surpeuplées.’³² Kigali is experienced, by the characters and the author, as haunted by the spectre of death; and in this way Tadjó creates an uneasy, liminal atmosphere where the streets are seen as hosting both dead and living together. Similarly, in *L’Ainé* by Monénembo survivor Faustin must negotiate the violence and danger of the streets long after the initial killing spree has ended. Indeed, Faustin’s relationship to pain problematizes any homogenising narrative of victims as defunct or broken as Monénembo persistently presents him as a *débrouillard* survivor who is less preoccupied with his own pain than negotiating the ongoing dangers of *la rue*. This not only means Monénembo can point out persistent problems of postcolonial Rwanda, but it underlines that victims are more than what they have suffered; that pain cannot become their single marker of identity. Faustin’s capacity for *diversion* is striking amongst the collection of Fest’Africa texts, since it sheds light on the creative potential of the narrating subject, rather than having him silenced by death or immobilised by trauma.³³ Monénembo’s contribution is unique in this sense, and achieves – in Faustin’s wily negotiation of survival – a fictional example of post-genocide self-writing. Unlike other texts which make the story primarily about the tragedy of April 1994 or specific scenes of torture, Monénembo keeps the ‘*avènements*’ (Faustin’s term) in the background. In this way the story admits the intractability of the genocide whilst not becoming dominated by it. There is no doubt as to the effects of the genocide, but the central storyline is Faustin’s own, and not that of Rwanda. Just as the Independence campaigns form only the backdrop to *Cinéma*, so here Monénembo critiques the

³² Tadjó, p. 53.

³³ The Fest’Africa texts, though not claiming to work through the trauma of Rwandan survivors, do much in conveying very different examples of post-traumatic experience. The emergence of scholarship surrounding ‘posttraumatic growth’ (Tedeschi and Calloun) has brought a new angle to genocide literary studies, and this work could form an elucidating point of comparison for literature which might emerge in Guinea following the outbreak of Ebola. Tim Woods (*African Pasts: Memory and History in African Literatures*, 2007) has explored both the dangers and benefits of applying trauma theory to non-Western contexts.

ostentatious protagonists of the political world by keeping them in the wings. This foregrounding of the everyday in place of grand narratives is typical of Monénembo's project, which aims to highlight the self-glorifying tendencies of post-independence African politicians by deliberately shifting their position to the shadows.³⁴ Faustin's schemes receive much more attention than those of the *génocidaires* and government authorities who are hardly mentioned, for example when he partners with English journalist Rodney in extracting cash and sympathy by fabricating sensationalised witness statements. What is more, Faustin's narrative ingenuity evidences Nganang's daring proposition that the genocide may form 'un lit fécond pour leur créativité', just as it is displayed immediately in the varied and imaginative contributions by the project's authors, whose creative energy is explored in the second half of this chapter.³⁵ There are distinctions in relations between pain and storytelling, as well as the context for conveying experiences of pain, but also singularities in genre, style, and the direction of criticism. Such variety and individuality within a collective is reflective of the uniqueness of each individual experience of the genocide itself. These stories not only counter both the unimaginative post-genocide narratives critiqued within the texts (for example the Western television viewers who comment that 'dê toute façon, quoi qu'il arrive au Rwanda, ce serait toujours pour les gens la même vieille histoire de nègres en train de se taper dessus'³⁶) and the historically essentialist trajectories of African thought lamented by Mbembe, but also speak an unquestionably dissident message to the undistinguishing genocide. Whereas the absence of thought leaves room for the banality of violence, the more room writers *take up* with creativity and reflexion, the less remains to be dominated by the

³⁴ There is of course a particular power in operating from the shadows, as I showed via *Les Crapauds-brousse* in the previous chapter.

³⁵ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 28.

³⁶ Diop, pp. 16-17.

teleology of violence.³⁷ As the project's writers in turn shape the space their texts inhabit (more *alteration*), they display thought, reflection, and more than that, imagination matched with productive energy. They trace potential routes into creative and critical thinking to be adopted by the African thinkers Mbembe and Nganang are so scathing of. In this way the project meets with Monénembo's wider aims in writing, which include the desire to show how narrative shapes a collective imaginary, and by himself writing creatively to influence imagination on a wider scale. In this way, as with Nganang's own career, the distance between politically engaged philosophy and creative writing is made smaller, and the opportunity for each to shape the other is taken hold of. The dynamic space created across the project is much like that of Monénembo's oeuvre as a whole: in its range of modes of storytelling and number of texts, this collective literary project is accommodating in the sense of *alteration* which Certeau promotes for culture more generally. That is, it provides a welcome to diversity 'that refuses to preach 'acculturation' or 'assimilation' – it is the hospitality that will alter its laws in its dynamic changing culture where immigration is not something to be 'dealt with' but is the life-blood of culture itself'.³⁸ Monénembo affirms the existence of different experiences of pain by welcoming them in this dynamic literary space, but in not having *L'Ainé* dominated by suffering, he secures a representation of the *détritus* of the postcolonial world which critiques the circumstances that render the pain possible.

For Nganang, this emerges in a shift in African literature which centralises the city, and it comprises a remarkably chaotic subjectivity and a fundamental deliquescence. As well as having to negotiate their own and others' experiences of

³⁷ Nganang follows Mbembe and Arendt here: 'C'est cette démission totale de l'intelligence dans le quotidien qui aura laissé la place à... 'la banalité de la violence'.' Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 53.

³⁸ Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 22.

pain, the survivor subjects of these texts must wind their way around the dangers of an unstable post-genocide city. Where Diop, Kayimahe and others retain the genocide as the main subject of their texts, Monénembo's narrative follows in the footsteps of Faustin as they traverse the city. As Nganang suggests, 'pour avoir une idée du chaos, il suffit de se promener tout simplement dans une ville africaine'.³⁹ It is from the perspective of a survivor *Wandersman* that the shifting shape of Kigali is established in *L'Aîné* and because Faustin stays in the streets, it is from this angle that Monénembo presents the city as chaotic and decaying. One of many lost children, Faustin is forced into autonomy when he is orphaned and into flight when his village is destroyed by *génocidaires*, and has to make a way for himself in the city. Travelling through the forest to Rutongo, his route is blocked by hundreds of 'corps mutilés éparpillés dans la brousse', (*L'Aîné*, p. 40), illustrative of 'le sable sanglant, et la boue malodorante des rues' which characterises the eroding landscape for Nganang.⁴⁰ His run-ins with violence stand as an example of a nation wrecked and dispersed by violence: 'Ayirwanda s'avança vers moi avec son gourdin et son poing américain. Je crus que mon œil s'était détaché de mon orbite et que mes côtes étaient parties en morceaux', (*L'Aîné*, p. 26). Faustin's tone is strikingly callous, and stands out in the Fest' Africa project as appearing less sensitive than other narrators'. However, his matter-of-fact commentary is a necessity of *débrouillard* streetlife, and indicative of the social critique and cynical outlook Nganang highlights as common to each *roman de détrit*.⁴¹ As is evident in the other texts addressed in this chapter, Monénembo persists in pinpointing concrete problems with the postcolonial African experience. There is, undoubtedly, a common representation of the streets as stinking of death, but there are other problems irrespective of the genocide. Poverty is rife, and like the characters of *Tribu*, Faustin has to invent ways to make ends meet. Alcohol is everywhere. The

³⁹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 260, p. 263.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 268.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 272.

role of religious organisations is far from straightforward: in *L'Aîné*, a church is the site of a massacre where hundreds of Tutsi sought refuge, and the voices of murdered missionaries haunt the text. In *Murambi* the church is turned into a museum, in a layering of events and functions which leaves sites of crime as scarred palimpsests somehow absorbed into the complexity of the city as life goes on. This merging of real and fictional, geographically, is mirrored textually in the Fest' Africa project. Where church buildings which were sites of massacres have been turned into memorial museums, fictional texts similarly stand as perhaps unexpected sites of commemoration. Any commemorative practice must traverse numbers of these different sites, accounting for their shifting layers and overlapping, and post-genocide writing can build upon this project's texts as an early foundation. What is more, sensitive attention *must* be paid to the traces of whatever has gone before, with respect given to the past alongside plans for the future. This sensitivity, it seems, was missing when the French-led Operation Turquoise played volleyball beside mass graves at Murambi. In paying attention to these things, Faustin's survivor eyes give an idea of the messy and menacing city, Nganang describes:

'De l'infini zigzagant du chemin qui est piste entre des maisons
croulantes, de l'inattendu de l'avenir qui est chemin tordu des routes,
du rythme de l'appel du muezzin qui est logorrhée verbale, du malaise
de la vie même qui est quartiers éléphantiasiques, de l'agora du verbe
qui est entrechoc de la parole des commentaires, oui, de l'ambiance
tourbillonnante de la ville qui vit en de pulsations incontrôlables et
violentes'.⁴²

⁴² Ibid., p. 265.

Rather than trying to impose order on this chaos, Monénembo moves his protagonist around this noisy and unpredictable city, conveying its turbulence most effectively through the eyes and steps of an *enfant survivant*.

Though a project whose title includes ‘devoir de mémoire’ risks being wholly retrospective, and thus falling short of Nganang’s requirements for writing which is preemptive, the project’s texts are in fact forward-looking in a number of ways. Firstly, in the critique to which we have just alluded, the text is not fixated on the past and there is inevitably some commitment towards change, through alteration: ‘Penser après le génocide ne peut que vouloir dire penser contre cette vie-là qui a rendu le génocide possible.’⁴³

Secondly, where *Murambi*, for example, has its protagonist revisit his aged uncle Simeon (who stands as a human memorial to pre-genocide Rwanda), Monénembo’s text has no characters from that generation, and a distinctly orphaned (yet youthful) character base. Consequently, *L’Aîné* has a distinct lack of nostalgia, vocalised by Faustin, ‘Avais-je pensé à eux durant tout ce temps? Je n’en étais pas sûr’, (*L’Aîné*, 75); as Nganang argues, there is little place for harking back in post-genocide writing. Though Faustin is occasionally prompted to remember, his *débrouillard* attitude keeps his focus on survival.⁴⁴

Thirdly, though Mbembe calls for African thinkers to wake up from a slumber which has lasted all too long, he insists on death being the starting point. The striking chapter ‘À partir du crâne d’un mort. Trajectoires d’une vie’ opens his essay on decolonised Africa with the reality of postcolonial Africa as shadowed by death. Hence the strength of the Fest’Africa project which, despite Nganang’s

⁴³ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁴ For example, after speaking about ‘les fameux *avènements* que ma mémoire ne voulait plus revoir’, (*L’Aîné*, p. 46) Faustin turns to acquiring food from abandoned shops: ‘j’avais appris à fort bien m’accommoder des choses telles qu’elles étaient’ (*L’Aîné*, p. 49).

criticism of the project as merely maintaining the genocide as an ‘epiphenomenon, a mad moment in African history’, in fact situates the genocide as a starting point from which an interrogation of African subjectivity can begin, and ‘forcefully addresses the death that rushes across [the] continent’.⁴⁵ Indeed – and this is where our attention will rest for the remainder of this chapter – Monénembo and his co-writers neither gaze stunned at the events of the genocide as ‘un moment fou’ nor in any way fall back on an unreflective African subject, but rather, using the events of 1994 as a starting point, centre their texts around the problematic self-writing of ambiguous protagonists. Situating themselves in the violence of what has happened, subjects can look to the future and say, like the protagonist of Diop’s novel, ‘there is life after the genocide, it’s time to move on to something else’.⁴⁶ In this sense, we catch a glimpse of the potential for posttraumatic growth as they move from the genocide to create a space for exploratory ‘pas risqués et douloureux’ problematizing not only the dangerous situation (as seen above) of postcolonial subjects, but their very practices of self-writing.⁴⁷

Where Mbembe condemns the historical vein of thought as insufficiently addressing the guilt of the African subject, in focussing on survivors, it is guilt which takes centre stage in post-genocide writing.⁴⁸ Across the texts there are several indictments of the worldwide inattention at the time of the genocide; a collective echo of the ‘où étiez vous?’ which is a refrain in his manifesto.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 41; and Nganang’s description of pre-emptive writing, from his essay ‘Necessary Doubt’, trans. Cullen Goldblatt, delivered at a symposium in July 2008 on the Genocide of the Tutsi. <<http://www.african-writing.com/seven/patricenganang.htm>> [accessed 23 July 2014].

⁴⁶ Diop, p. 224.

⁴⁷ ‘Calhoun and Tedeschi (2006) pioneered the concept of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), a construct of positive psychological change that occurs as the result of one’s struggle with a highly challenging, stressful, and traumatic event.’ <<http://www.posttraumaticgrowth.com/what-is-ptg/>> [accessed 30 July 2014] This concept is relevant to our discussion of creativity below, and could also shed light on writing in exile.

⁴⁸ Mbembe, ‘African Modes of Self-Writing’, p. 260.

⁴⁹ Nganang quotes a young woman from François Woukouache’s documentary film from 2000 *Nous ne sommes plus morts* who addresses this question to the writers visiting as part

finger is pointed at those who are guilty by failure to act, those distracted by more trivial things: ‘La coupe du monde de football allait bientôt commencer aux États-Unis. Rien d’autre n’intéressait la planète.’⁵⁰ Monénembo’s own critique in *L’Aîné* of inadequate European rescue efforts matches his call for international attention on Africa elsewhere. In response to the humanitarian reports which would seek to present a sense of control and stability, Monénembo ridicules the futile attempts of aid workers to placate the orphans with ‘des cerceaux, des poupées, des sifflets...Le rap! Le soukouss! La salsa!’ (*L’Aîné*, 64); the orphans subsequently run rings around them, easily exploiting their naïve efforts. Again, Monénembo’s incensed voice cries out, ‘En droit, il existe le délit de non-assistance à personne en danger. A quand le délit de non-assistance à peuple en danger?’.⁵¹ His critique of such inattention is completed through a sustained characterisation of subjects who are self-aware and who self-consciously problematize their own responsibility. The absence of discernment, reflexion and thought which Nganang decries is redressed in this post-genocide writing by giving persistent attention to figures who question their roles and responsibilities. Though the project’s texts address (to differing degrees) Western culpability, they do so within an interrogation of innocence and subjectivity that is an integral part of re-casting the postcolonial African subject (in a global context). Criticism is certainly not reserved for Westerners, and in this literary response to an African tragedy, African guilt is centralised. What transpires – and fiction is uniquely placed to express this – is guilt and innocence are not as distant as we would comfortably prefer to assume.

of the Fest’Africa residential project. <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2fhga_1-nous-ne-sommes-plus-morts_news> [accessed 29 July 2014]

⁵⁰ Diop, p. 19. This is illustrative of the derision of media across the project’s texts. See also *L’Aîné* where Faustin’s greatest mistrust is reserved for journalists. This comes as no surprise when we recall the implication of Radio et Télévision Libres des Mille Collines in inciting the murder of Tutsis in 1994.

⁵¹ Monénembo, ‘La Guinée, cinquante ans d’indépendance et d’enfer’, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2009.

All the project's texts necessarily engage with African survivors – evidence of those who were interviewed by the writers when in Kigali, but also of the truth that 'au fond, ne sommes-nous pas tous des survivants du génocide du Rwanda?'.⁵² Certainly the participating authors are aware of this, and self-consciously question their involvement by inscribing their texts with autobiographical passages and doubts. Tadjó, whose text features diary excerpts from two trips she made to Rwanda, asks, 'qu'aurais-je fait si j'avais été prise dans l'engrenage du massacre? Aurais-je résisté à la trahison? Aurais-je été lâche ou courageuse? Aurais-je tué ou me serais-je laissé tuer?'.⁵³

Their hesitation in undertaking the task of writing is understandable, and all the more readily when we read of how the project was received by some Rwandan survivors. Abdourahman Ali Waberi shares that they were asked to write essays rather than fictional writing, due to the connotations of *fiction* and *falsification*, and the risk of confusing *personne* and *personnage*.⁵⁴ Just how to negotiate bearing witness to atrocity through creative writing, whilst remaining both sensitive and politically engaged, is to commit to a demanding act of ethical dimensions, and yet the writers achieve this by the very questions they ask about their own role. Standing as opaque subjects, visitors accused of arriving too late, tentatively and painstakingly the writers exemplify the complexity of marking out initial 'pas risqués et douloureux' in post-genocide writing.⁵⁵

⁵² Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 33.

⁵³ Tadjó, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Eloïse Brezault, 'Entretien avec Abdourahman A. Waberi', <<http://www.africultures.com/vitrine/rwanda/rwanda.htm>> [accessed 23 July 2014].

⁵⁵ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 25. It is important to note too that the participating authors are aware of being affected by the experience of staying in Kigali. Part of their *duty* in writing is to transfer that experience textually in order to evoke similar responses in readers. African postcolonial authors who choose to write in French have more reach into Francophone reading communities globally, and thus open up the possibility of affecting and altering many readers unable or unlikely to enter physically into the worlds they depict textually.

Similar ambiguities are written into the fictional survivor characters, whose insider-outsider, innocent-guilty statuses emerge with frequency, embodying the impossibility Adorno describes of ‘un sujet post-génocide qui soit encore habillé des limbes de l’innocence’. The writers’ characterisation of protagonist survivors marks this corpus of writing on the genocide as distinct from accounts which are constituted by homogenising victim narratives that sideline the complexity of existing as a survivor. We find a parallel between Certeau’s *débrouillard* agent and Nganang’s prioritising of the survivor character, through whom the culpability of the African subject is put on display. ‘[E]n soulignant son évidente participation à la danse de la mort’, the writers show the culpability of the African subject.⁵⁶ This guilty characterisation appears in a number of the texts, for example, in the alternating chapters which align victims with perpetrators in *Murambi*, where after the story of a victim brutally killed, a Rwandan doctor and a French colonel nonchalantly discuss their involvement, ‘Vous teniez ce pays, colonel. Vous connaissiez chaque rouage de la machine à tuer et vous avez regardé ailleurs parce que cela vous arrangeait.’⁵⁷ This kind of textual structuring blurs the lines between guilty and innocent, effectively expressing the ubiquitous existence of guilt around the genocide: ‘Des enfants ont tué des enfants, des prêtres ont tué des prêtres, des femmes ont tué des femmes enceintes...’ (*L’Aîné*, 41). As Mahmood Mamdani observes, ‘whereas Nazis made every attempt to separate victims from perpetrators, the Rwandan genocide was very much an intimate affair’.⁵⁸ In a world where ‘le principe de la vie après le génocide est concomitant de celui de la drastique culpabilité’,⁵⁹ the project’s authors creatively form a stage on which ‘il n’y a plus d’innocents’, (*L’Aîné*, 41) and upon which the juxtaposition of

⁵⁶ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 34, p. 46.

⁵⁷ Diop, p. 161. This alternating structure, with each character given time to testify, could be said to mirror the process of trying thousands in Rwanda’s Gacaca courts between 2002 and 2012.

⁵⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *When victims become killers: colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 35.

perpetrators and victims allows for a complex mimesis of that intimacy, one which exclusively testimonial accounts cannot incorporate.

The intimacy and ambivalence of the survivor figures is conveyed most powerfully when encapsulated in just one adolescent protagonist: Monénembo's Faustin.

L'Aîné des orphelins is largely a character study which provides a response to the genocide that is more about re-casting the African subject than about wider culpability. All interpretation of the genocide and its aftermath comes through this orphan's self-centred narrative which, as we have seen, keeps the *avènements* he misnames in the background. Monénembo characterises Faustin as the epitome of a *débrouillard* survivor, forced as he is into autonomous survival, having arrived in Kigali from Rutongo. Yet Monénembo sets him as a vehicle for recasting the African child figure, since, as a victim of the genocide (he witnesses the massacre of his parents and others), Faustin unsettles our received narrative of victimhood.⁶⁰ This is because his general behaviour and methods for survival are underhand and dishonest (he steals, is conceited, mean and violent), and thus a long way from an innocent child figure.⁶¹ The symbolism of a teenage protagonist also aligns Monénembo with Nganang who argues that

Rwanda taught us many things, but above all, I believe, it brought us, Africans, out of childhood. And when I say childhood I am thinking of the denial of responsibility that, from slavery to colonization, has

⁶⁰ In contrast, for example, with pictures displayed on global media of helpless, starving children with swollen stomachs. 'Thus postcolonial Africa exists in the consciousness of the general public in the rich world...mainly as a succession of unforgettable photographs of large-eyed victims... The ubiquity of those photographs, and those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world.' Susan Sontag, *Regarding the pain of others* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 63-64. The agency and culpability of the subjects here render such uncritical reception impossible.

⁶¹ *L'Aîné*, p. 55 for an example of Faustin stealing.

inserted us in a paradigm based essentially on victimhood. Rwanda showed us what we are capable of.⁶²

Furthermore, Faustin is a criminal, and narrates his story from prison where he is awaiting trial for the murder of a fellow gang member. In a manner recalling Camus' *Meursault*, guilty of the crime, Faustin shows no remorse, and his account of the shooting is typical of his impenitent and deliberately matter-of-fact tone: 'Contrairement à ceux que l'on croit, il n'est pas facile de tuer un homme. Il me semble que le corps de Musinkôro continua de bouger', (*L'Aîné*, 123). Rarely emotional, Faustin's attitude is largely one of focussed pragmatism, and he connects with and disconnects from people according to what (money, affection, alcohol) he can extract from them. Elsewhere in the project, such unrepentant pragmatism is attributed to instigators of the genocide, but here the callous and wily narrative comes from an orphaned teenager.⁶³ Monénembo's textual structure, which moves at pace between scenes, lends itself to a depiction of this protagonist who is ever on the move, intertwining his imagination with his trauma, but always prioritising his *débrouillardise*. This comes through clearly when he tells tales, conveniently elaborating details for emotive effect, and exploiting sympathy for lucrative gain. More widely, the project works to renew African subjectivity in this way by highlighting the porous boundary between truth and fiction: as survivors tell their stories, ruse and invention is revealed at their heart. Monénembo shows that we are not to romanticise the African subject – an essentialising tendency for which Diawara finds Rurangwa's text at fault, where the latter concretises Tutsis as

⁶² Nganang, 'Necessary Doubt'.

⁶³ Cf. Diop, p. 132, where the business-like Doctor Karekezi speaks about a massacre: 'Bien sûr, je n'ai pas aimé cette scène. Je suis ni un monstre ni un imbécile. Je mentirais cependant en disant qu'elle m'a beaucoup affecté. Il s'agit, si on est un homme décidé, de savoir ce qu'on veut. Nous sommes en guerre, un point c'est tout. La manière parfois un peu sadique dont les choses se passent est sans importance. Notre objectif final est juste. Rien d'autre ne compte.'

total victims.⁶⁴ But nor are we to criminalise him or her: Faustin is aware that he is victim and perpetrator of crimes, honest and insincere, childlike and corrupted. Such ambivalence is demonstrated in other characters like Niko, protagonist of Gilbert Gatore's *Le passé devant soi*.⁶⁵ Reading characters and writers who are self-consciously culpable in this way, we are reminded that to some extent, all survivors are implicated, and we must therefore tread the terrain of establishing post-genocide blame and justice most cautiously.

Whilst we observe that the ten writers each choose to prioritise different elements, when we read fictionalised survivors' narratives like Faustin's we are reminded that testimony too relies on the imagination, and therefore that it must equally be searched out for narrative choices and elements of fiction. Of course this does not mean we dismiss any testimony or narrative as invalid. Does Faustin's insincerity disqualify him as a reliable witness? Does the obviously fictional nature of *L'Ainé* make it a less helpful contribution to post-genocide writing? Indeed not. These highlight the complicated processes of combing truth and creative writing, as well as the potential for incorporating testimony. They point to the subjective nature of all narrative, and thus highlight both the fiction of political voices and the ambivalence of narrator subjects who, like Faustin, are at once guilty of insincerity and capable of creative invention.⁶⁶ Beyond their pain, survivors are complex subjects who practise inventive and self-conscious narrativity. Such creativity not only leads us to reconsider narratives of victimhood, but also points to the affective potential of storytelling – a key element for Nganang's pre-emptive writing. More

⁶⁴ Diawara, 'This logic of permanent Tutsi victimhood mobilizes the whole country against one enemy only...to the detriment of nation building, peace and reconciliation.'

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Applegate, 'Reimagining the Swallow and the Toad: Narrating Identity and Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda', *Research in African Literatures* 43:1 (2010), 70-88, (p. 72).

⁶⁶ See also the myths spread by Radio et Télévision Libres des Mille Collines and Nganang, whose manifesto rightly emphasises the role of language in inciting the violence of both the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda: 'Tous les deux naissent d'une totale perte de vue de la signification absolue de la vie, écrasée qu'elle est sous *les mots vides*, sous les préjugés d'imbéciles, sous les chiffres aveugles de fonctionnaires, dans *la langue de bois* de l'idéologie...' Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 32 (my emphasis).

than the project's other texts, Monénembo's post-genocide novel exhibits this, just as the author does elsewhere. In *Cinéma* and *La Tribu des gonzeesses* the protagonists are *débrouillard* narrator subjects and Monénembo centralises his most dramatized texts on their stories to continue his critique of postcolonial experience and his positive representation of narrative power.

Performing stories

We have just seen how narrative and pain come together in the stories of Faustin and other fictionalised survivors to counter homogenising victim narratives around the genocide in Rwanda. The commemorative project stands as a public stage for telling stories, and provides a dynamic literary space from which the complexity of suffering and surviving can be expressed. In what follows, Monénembo continues to show that unlike in homogenising narratives of victimhood, the subjects of his stories are wily and creative narrative agents, and he emphasises their physical presence as an undeniable tactic against the invisibility politics so evident in Chapter Two and in the opening part of this chapter. Whereas in the Rwanda project we saw global media criticised, here Monénembo plays on different genres, maximising both screen and stage in order to highlight the power of narrative. At the same time, he continues to point out the hardship and instability of various postcolonial contexts, and in particular reveals the layers of invention and deception which prevail as a result. Regarding storytelling as performance, we will now see how such narrative practice relates to space, finding it most helpful to look at its communal, physical, creative, and self-conscious aspects. In these respects, the stories told in *Cinéma* and *Tribu* lend themselves in particular to a discussion of performance, these being Monénembo's most dramatized texts and where he most emphasises the conscious construction of narrative.

La Tribu des gonzeesses, Monénembo's only published play, is set in modern day Paris and sees six Cameroonian nationals living illegally in France. The script we read elucidates the communal aspects of storytelling as performance. By paying attention here to the dialogic nature of narrative, we highlight one source of narrative creativity and lay the path for our subsequent examination of the other features concerned here.

Community

Monénembo's narrative emphasises the physicality in performance of narrating *together*. There is an emphasis, especially in the female community of *Tribu*, on being alongside one another. Performing narrative is a conscious occupying of space as a site of interaction that points to the communal potential of storytelling, and consequently its potential to shape that space communally. In the example of a female group of illegal immigrants Monénembo shows that even unlikely subjects have power to determine community and space through language.

This counters the tactics of disappearance (so clear in *Les Crapauds-brousse* and *Les Écailles du ciel*, explored in the last chapter) by making characters visible, audible and tangible, and counters the loneliness of survival by drawing together multiple figures who share one space. Monénembo sets his play in a deliberately limited space (one sitting room) and in that closed space he emphasises touch: the women of *Tribu* greet, sit with, and hold each other. As is typical in Monénembo, sharing the present is given precedence over establishing common origins. In *Tribu* though most characters are from the same place, their affinity and mutual appreciation is established by their ongoing shared experience. Monénembo indicates with a recurring refrain, 'Comment aurait-on survécu? ! Dans cet enfer! ! Dans cette merde! ! Dans cette galère!',⁶⁷ that such presence speaks louder than origins or genealogy. Shared dialogue is embodied in the present, and creates a

⁶⁷ *Tribu*, p. 29. See also p. 37 and p. 77 for the same refrain in a different order.

space of togetherness. The physical space of the theatre, inhabited by these dialogues, becomes a common ground in which ‘to understand the impact of events on everyday life and the continuing impact and interplay of meanings from historical events’.⁶⁸ This is as necessary for immigrants in Paris as orphan survivors in Rwanda.

In light of what has already been said regarding the energy and influence of oral storytelling traditions (in Chapter One of the thesis, and the introduction to this chapter), it is important to dwell a while on who is listening in these performances, as well as who is narrating. In *Cinéma* as in *Tribu* there is a breaking down of barriers that creates a fresh awareness of speaker-listener encounters. In *Tribu* Monénembo uses symbolism with walls and doors to convey that physical boundaries need not inhibit collaborative narrativity. Indeed, there are efforts to traverse those barriers, with Madame Scarano’s entrance into the apartment, Kesso’s interruption into the salon from behind the wardrobe door, and arguably the absence of the ‘fourth wall’ between actors and audience.

The result is a strong sense of proximity, whether between characters, or between characters and in-text audience. My view is that Monénembo includes *Tribu* in his literary oeuvre as a transparent demonstration of collective narrating in order to prove the transformative power of storytelling. Theatre makes it obvious that narrative is mutual. The being there for one another and being affected by one another establishes a sense of co-operation arguably best illustrated in an all-female cast,⁶⁹ and the proximity of speakers spotlights the importance of listening

⁶⁸ Niz Jabour, ‘Iraqi Memories. A Personal and Poetic Exploration of Homecomings, Departures and Arrivals from a Theatre Director Who Fled Iraq in 1987 and Returns Home Again’, in *Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters*, ed. by Michael Balfour (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2013), pp. 3-13 (p. 13).

⁶⁹ Monénembo provides a remarkable insight into female psyche which will be explored in our discussion of narrators of exile in Chapter Four.

to narrative. We return now to some theoretical paradigms to give us a clearer direction.

Seeing the speakers' names alongside the dialogue acts as a reminder of the interactive nature of this dramatic narrative, and the different ways it fits together. In particular, these visible signals throughout the script highlight what Mikhail Bakhtin refers to as the addressivity of an utterance, by which he means the conditioning of speech in light of the addressee. Each utterance is a link in the wider chain of the speech communication of a particular sphere, in which 'they are aware of and mutually reflect one another', being shaped and developed as they are by continuous and constant interaction with others.⁷⁰ They are visual reminders of what Jacques Brès terms 'la négociation interactive de l'acte narratif'.⁷¹ This dialogic constitution of narrative is represented on a different scale by the alternating chapters of *Pelourinho*, which will be discussed in Chapter Four, but in *Tribu* it permeates the whole text.

Emmanuel Levinas' work on responsibility and encounter adds an ethical dimension to this 'being together'. According to Levinas, the subject first experiences itself as called and responsible in the encounter with another subject; there is something enigmatic in the human face which elicits both responsibility to that other, and for oneself in how one responds. This response marks the beginning of language as dialogue, and from here stems intersubjectivity.⁷² In *Tribu*, different as they are, no one character is ever isolated on stage. The very thing which makes

⁷⁰ According to Bakhtin, a general confusion between sentence (a unit of language) and utterance (a unit of speech) leads to the misleading belief that only the speaker influences the construction of speech. M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech genres and other late essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 91.

⁷¹ By which Brès means, 'Le narrateur vérifie par avance que le narrataire est disposé à l'écouter: il tâche de le placer en position de demandeur.' Cited in Mamoussé Diagne, *Critique de la raison orale* (Paris: Karthala, 2005), p. 131.

⁷² Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than being, or, Beyond essence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

us human, according to Levinas, that face-to-face encounter with another, is what constitutes the play, and the characters grow from this alone. In this postcolonial context, the author thus gives value again to the most basic of human interactions: giving them the power to define his characters (instead of money or official papers, for instance, neither of which are owned by the women). Monénembo is perhaps remarking here on the stronger need for tangible community when far from home – a pattern also seen in *Attiéké* and *Pelourinho* – but more so, on the strength of human connection which is evident in speech, and our very connectedness albeit in diversity. All three of these elements are quashed by essentialist beliefs which can spawn acts of hatred like those of the genocide. In magnifying the intricacies of dialogue, we observe Monénembo's postcolonial commitment to community in diversity, and his characterisation in *Tribu* stands as an enacting of Levinasian encounters, responsibility, and intersubjectivity. Dialogue moves forward naturally as characters develop their narratives via one another and reach outside each of their own stories in order to define and shape them collectively. It is always directed by relationship, be it an assurance of friendship, a humorous impersonation, or an angry outburst. Although ostensibly their lives are separate (not sharing a house or family), their friendships provide the context for dialogue to increase proximity. Personal anecdotes and memories are told by other characters as their words weave in and out of each other's and the flow of speech progressively reveals how intertwined their stories really are. The proximity of the actors on stage and the short, interchanging passages of speech highlight the interactive nature of narrative (and by consequence, of identity) and the intertwined nature of the subjects' existence as immigrants in Paris. Where the group of immigrant women are largely excluded from the rest of Parisian society, together their experience is of inclusive, close community. Again, Monénembo's choices of genre and style foreground the dialogic nature of narrative: play, performance, and storytelling evolve through creative interaction, and the strong

sense of togetherness in this community is effectively illustrated in this evolution. The play script we read not only highlights the performative aspect of the work, but also the responsibility characters experience for one another, as they bounce off one another in reciprocal, alternating speech. The lack of a narrator makes this more immediate and present, since although the presence of stage directions acts as a reminder of the author's creative power, there is no single host or director within the text.

The forward moving conversation in *Tribu* exemplifies the cooperative nature of dialogue, never dominated by one speaker but continually reoriented by the contributions of each of the actors, and thus indicates the reciprocal shaping of space these subjects practise. Thus the listener plays a role in shaping speech by actively engaging with it:

The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on.⁷³

Okassa and Zenzie, because of their proximity and bickering, are the clearest example of narratives developing as responses to one another, whether opposing, arguing, distracting, or teasing.

ZENZIE On te comprend!

OKASSA Que veux-tu insinuer?

ZENZIE Insinuer? Moi, j'ai insinué? Éyenga, tu m'as vu insinuer?

(*Tribu*, p. 45)

It is never a case of one addressee passively hearing a speaker, but always actively

⁷³ Bakhtin, p. 68.

responding, and thus we see their postcolonial identities and situation being shaped not diachronically but primarily synchronically, that is by relations in the present (just as these women, it transpires, are all linked by having slept with the same man). The face-to-face encounters here eliciting responsibility for one another and evidencing that most basic human connecting through dialogue are worlds away from the faceless dictatorship of *Les Crapauds-brousse* or the inhumane destructiveness of the genocide in Rwanda. Monénembo uses specific instances of dialogue to illustrate the wider fact that space and subjects are conditioned by multiple interactions, that such interactions make us human, and that in postcolonial contexts there is a particularly diverse presence of subjects, which adds to the complexity and richness of intersubjectivity.

Where Bakhtin pinpoints the dialogic formation of speech, in his discussion of the utterance, which emphasises the difference between the Saying (*l'énonciation*) and the Said (*l'énoncé*), Levinas explores in particular the ethical implications of the Saying being interactive. For Levinas, there is a sequence of ethical consequences to the encounter which occurs in any utterance. He writes that 'the saying is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it'.⁷⁴ We see this embodied as the women in Paris adjusting to each other on stage in *Tribu*. In the Rwanda project, each of the publications was a complex response to what the writers faced in Kigali, and Monénembo provokes his readers to question what their own responses will be to situations he presents. This series of face to face encounters is especially poignant for Monénembo, and the importance of community is evident across his writing. Having observed the back-turning shift to Independence after the 1958 referendum, and its consequences, the author is committed to emphasising the potential of encounters.

⁷⁴ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 88, cited in *Refugee Performance*, ed. by Balfour, p. 210.

This facing or presenting aspect of the telling and saying is, of course, inherent in all speech/writing since there is always an imagined/real addressee. However, in these storytelling texts – where physicality and performance are especially centralised – the importance of an (imagined/real) audience renders the ‘facing’ more real, more present somehow. What is more, in fictional narratives, the (re)presentation is a creative process, which means that the encounter is played with somehow; in other words, Monénembo as a creative writer is playing with the making present of things, and in particular in the encounters of narrator and reader (or audience, in the case of his play(s)). His *représentations* (in both the sense of representation and performance) are marked by intentional teller-hearer encounters, where both parties are positioned to encounter an ‘other’. This renders each subject more human than broader narratives (immigration data etc.) would render them. Significantly, these encounters tend to occur between subjects who do not possess much ostensible/official power, and not those who, like Samba in *Tribu* remain totally absent, or Sékou Touré who is hidden behind a showman’s façade. Given the transformative potential of narrative, it is unsurprising that those wielding power are shown by Monénembo to be unwilling to engage in face to face dialogic encounters.

For those who do, Levinas describes the result of being presented undeniably with the other as an epiphany. The presence of an addressee cannot be denied by the speaker, nor vice versa. This can be more or less physically overt, as we explore below, but always necessarily, by its present-ness, counteracts the invisibility politics (of discourses on trauma, childhood, and migration) we encounter elsewhere. On stage, the *représentation* is doubly obvious, as characters present themselves to each other *and* to the audience. On stage it is clear they are not autonomous, and the communal nature of narrative is foregrounded. As Tom Burvill concludes, ‘it is Levinas’s idea of the active, responsive, corporeal

encounter with alterity that is so pertinent to ethical responsibility. Performance is uniquely situated to embody and facilitate this'.⁷⁵

Consequently, Levinas describes the ethical reaction which ensues, which he terms response-ability. When faced so undeniably with an other, and this other's story, one is lead to unconditional responsibility for the other (and this constitutes the fundamental structure of subjectivity). The capacity to respond is more than cognitive and linguistic (as in Bakhtin) but ethical, as we see in the decision by writers to answer a sense of *devoir* and participate in a collaborative literary response to the genocide. This writing is pre-emptive in the following ways: as a heterogeneous and communal project, it prevents the kind of essentialist narrative which leads to discrimination and exclusion; and, in the way it affects a reader personally through encounter, it has a lasting effect. That is, once a different story is heard from a different voice, it cannot be ignored, and the receptive space must shift to make room. Theatre brings such encounters physically face to face, heightening the sense of responsibility for the other. In *Tribu*, Éyenga's heart is drawn to empathise with Madame Scarano in caring response when the latter confirms the abuse she has suffered at the hands of her husband. It is worth noting that it is the illegal immigrant who helps the married French woman: a challenge to any anti-immigration narratives which are either wholly hostile or condescending in their portrayal of immigrants as threatening or helpless. As in the Fest' Africa project, Monénembo centralises the responses of African subjects, depicting them as more responsive and engaged than Europeans in the same settings. Thus he continues to respond to Mbembe's concerns for unreflexive subjectivity in postcolonial Africa at the same time as valuing collaboration over conflict.

⁷⁵ Tom Burvill, 'Politics Begins as Ethics': Levinasian Ethics and Australian Performance Concerning Refugees', in *Refugee Performance*, ed. by Balfour, p. 210.

Outside the text, Monénembo himself continues to write responsively, entering into an inter-textual dialogue for example with humanitarian accounts of post-genocide rehabilitation which list data but not details. His corpus as an involvement in wider conversations about immigration and childhood demonstrates his determination to engage dynamically with politics through literature. Each of these three texts constitutes an enactment of the responsibility taken by Monénembo for creating space (in several genres) to counteract the invisibility politics of international/nationalist discourses. This engagement is deliberately collaborative (in the case of *L'Aîné*) and wide-reaching (in terms of genre and readership): signs that the author's commitment to write is set against policies or endeavours which seek to divide and/or marginalise.

What I suggest happens next is a cultural shift whereby the listener (be that a theatre audience, or a single reader, or those partaking in the Rwanda literary project) is adjusted or adjusts to make room for this other and her/his story. In this way storytelling facilitates the practices of hospitality which Certeau proposes in his *The Capture of Speech*: he advocates spaces where heterogeneous voices can be celebrated and shared.⁷⁶ Both Certeau and Monénembo privilege the spoken word, seeing it as the host for otherness and everyday life. Monénembo's teller-listener encounters are productive in the following ways: the listener/reader re-views things seen according to preconceptions until then; there is subsequently more room made for difference. Certeau and Levinas would advocate for these changes influencing cultural policy, which is arguably on Monénembo's agenda as well, given his critique of Touré. Whether addressing historiography or cultural policy, Certeau's

⁷⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and other Political Writings* trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 139. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, Certeau advocates an approach to culture which promotes and incorporates difference in a welcoming space. 'For de Certeau 'diversity' is the fundamental operation of alteration in the face of those that are other than you: it is the welcome that refuses to preach 'acculturation' or 'assimilation' – it is the hospitality that will alter its laws...' Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 22.

challenge remains the same: ‘to fashion culture so that it is more open to a plurality of voices’.⁷⁷ In being open to such exchanges, the sense of responsibility felt for the other is aptly conveyed in Monénembo’s dialoguing characters.

Narrating proves to be productive then in the way it leads, through encounter with others, to an alteration of the space of literary reception. In this sense it is always a creative communal practice. The whole process of storytelling, from resourcing to mobile construction, is elucidated by a focus on performance. The storytelling practices observed here are at once physical, playful, and deliberate, and thus follow many of the same steps as that spatial *débrouillardise* seen in Chapter Two.

To orient our exploration of two important questions in this section, I turn now to Mamoussé Diagne and his *Critique de la raison orale*. This is to help assess how storytelling is a performance which inhabits and shapes communal space.

Staged speech

For Diagne, addressing orality reveals that all communication is in some sense a staging:

C’est dire que le contexte de l’oralité impose, de toutes façons [sic], à l’idée qui veut s’y exprimer, les règles d’un jeu auquel il est difficile, voire impossible, de se soustraire. Ce jeu, qui impose sa rigueur dès l’en-deçà de l’énonciation, de tout vouloir-dire, contraint l’idée à ne s’exprimer efficacement que par la médiation d’une théâtralisation organisée à cette fin. Mais comme l’esprit ne subit pas passivement ces contraintes, la variété des ressources dont il use préserve sa marge de liberté créatrice, qui est précisément celle de l’imaginaire.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Highmore, p. 176.

⁷⁸ Mamoussé Diagne, *Critique de la raison orale* (Paris: Karthala, 2005), p. 121.

Orality, according to Diagne, determines not only the modes of expression but the limits within which the imagination will work. In contexts of cultural orality, certain systems of representation will be observed, conditioned as they are by what is required for effective expression. With this in mind we are primed to locate narratives which resemble a performance in Monénembo's narratives. This is clearly most obvious in his play, but also evident in the other texts discussed here.

Depending on context, the rules of expression will vary, but in every case, the resources available to the speaker are rich and varied. Within the *mise en scène* of any idea there is a playful creativity which is exemplified in *Cinéma* below: a sense of rules to follow and/or manipulate, and a wealth of resources to utilise. In *Cinéma*, 14-year-old Binguel self-consciously relates his daily dance with danger in 1950s Guinea. The text follows a series of escapades as he seeks to negotiate changes in the social, family and political life of Mamou. What will be most striking in reading *Cinéma* is the way the text imitates a film through the physicality of Monénembo's descriptions and the way Binguel and his companions play their way through several different worlds. What we see in Binguel and other characters is a capacity for diversion and ruse, and one which grows with experience. Storytelling is an idea embodied, 'jouée et rejouée par et pour des sujets physiquement existants', hence the value of consecrating this section to those most dramatized texts and focussing on the physicality of their narratives.⁷⁹ As we will see shortly, Monénembo demonstrates this kind of 'diversion' played out on a wider scale in the reshuffling which happens after the 1958 split from France in *Cinéma*.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

Using space

As this thesis seeks to establish, Monénembo prioritises space over origins and in his corpus we have ready ground for exploring postcolonial subjects' relationships to space. These performance narratives are necessarily and intentionally physical in nature, proving right Mbembe's claim that there is no identity without territoriality.⁸⁰ The physicality of these stories arguably renders them more substantial than other more superficial narratives, but at the same time marks them out as conscious performances. Just as in the texts analysed in Chapter Two where attention is given to the use of Diouldé and Samba's bodies, here both physically and linguistically the subjects perform acts of self-writing. In addressing performance, our attention is drawn to the physical agency at work in narrativity and as a result we see the postcolonial subject represented as a vocal embodiment of power.

On stage and screen, body language speaks as loud as words, which is why the stories here can be read as biopoetic acts. Unlike the Rwanda texts, *Cinéma* emphasises a physicality which is based more on play than on pain. It is through playful, deliberate and dramatic moves that characters convey their stories. Diagne's work interrogates the specificity of oral communication: namely, how the centrality of the spoken word and techniques of dramatization form a particular way of thinking and being. This 'raison orale' differs significantly from the 'raison graphique' conditioned by written communication.⁸¹ Again Diagne is helpful:

On pourrait concevoir le sujet oral comme quelqu'un qui (se) narre des histoires de genre, de longueur et d'importance variables. Mais, dans tous les cas, la dramatisation fait exister une scène où un scénario est à chaque fois joué par des acteurs, de façon à donner une

⁸⁰ Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p. 266.

⁸¹ Diagne, p. 18.

signification à l'aventure de l'homme et du monde. De sorte que la critique de la raison orale pourrait se concevoir, sans paradoxe, comme un répertoire des différentes postures de jeu.⁸²

Diagne's choice of language here emphasises the inevitably *physical* nature of narrative: the speaking subject *plays out* her/his narrative in a series of moves. In his biopic-novel, Monénembo conveys Binguel's increasing confidence in the way he occupies space and this comes in correlation with an increase in twofold play – playing a role (impersonating film stars) and playing a game, to which we now turn. The emphasis Monénembo places on Binguel's performing body presents a keen example of the creative, physical agency he depicts elsewhere, arguing as he does that African subjects in vastly different contexts make use of multiple resources for self-writing. The embodiment of this *playing* illustrates the power of the nomadic postcolonial subject and thus answers subjugation depicted elsewhere (by Monénembo and others) with a creative and ludic counterattack. Of course the indirect critique continues when, in light of such playfulness and deception, Sékou Touré's Independence narrative is re-examined as a script without consequence.

Playing

In the opening chapter of *Cinéma*, Monénembo sets the tone directly for the games Binguel is playing. As in a film, the action opens on him hunting down his opponent then surveying him from a high vantage point, literally marking out Diagne's 'postures de jeu'. He repeats the rules commanded him by the man who is now his prey: 'N'oublie jamais, petit : le mousquet pour les braves, la pitié pour les marioles!...Toujours aller de l'avant! Retourner sur ses pas est manière de couardise', (*Cinéma*, 12-13). The game of chase exudes physicality: Monénembo includes a proliferation of positions and movement verbs (glisser, fouler, franchit, se juche) which set the scene of the faceoff between the two boys. It is about

⁸² Ibid., p. 21.

standing one's ground and marking territory with one's body – a *débrouillard* tactic we saw in the previous chapter and which here goes hand in hand with the thematics of the Western movie that constitute *Cinéma*. Mobility is paramount and Binguel's actual game playing throughout the book exhibits a readiness and agility which indicate the wily practice he grew used to as a child: 'Mon enfance fut un redoutable jeu de cache-cache duquel j'avais appris à ne pas sortir toujours perdant.' (*Cinéma*, 45). Whether the game is escaping his father's discipline, aggravating Mère-Griefs, or hiding in wait to prove who is the most 'caïd', Binguel plays his way through the text.

Parallel metamorphoses

The other sense of play is more obvious, and permeates the text (including the title). Monénembo juxtaposes a parallel cinematic discourse with Binguel's everyday ventures throughout, such that the lines between fiction and reality are blurred. Though a novel in form, *Cinéma* reads more like the script of a biopic of self-narrated adventure: there are no long descriptive passages, and instead consecutive dialogues and bouts of action move the plot forward at a fast pace. Passages in italics pull in the reader's attention as Binguel soliloquises his way through invented scenarios, always modelling such dialogues on the confident demeanour of his cowboy heroes: '*En non, mon vieux, je ne suis plus celui que tu as connu, en esprit et en corpulence...*' (*Cinéma*, 81).⁸³ Such self-scripting not only gives insight into the young protagonist's imagination, but consolidates the cinematic tone of the novel as a whole. These passages epitomise the act of playing by drawing attention to Binguel seeing himself as an actor in a story; the protagonist performer of his autobiography. He plays games and roles, and all this innovative play is vocalised in a director's recurring meta-commentary. At the interface between truth and fiction, narrative dexterity not only flourishes but is a

⁸³ See also p. 115 and p. 122.

lucid and self-conscious practice. Binguel's ludic performances highlight that each narrative is an enactment of subjective agency,⁸⁴ evidencing a wily capacity for negotiating multiple spaces which I explore further below.

More than this though, Monénembo's cinematic focus enables him to comment on the reception of Guinea's transition to Independence. The novel's filmic style positions the reader as a spectator of the rapid changes of 1958 Guinea, and through a deliberate paralleling of stories, successfully provokes a scepticism which hints at that of Guineans of the period. As Michael Syrotinski has also observed, Binguel stands as an allegory for Guinea's own political adolescence following the vote to become an independent state.⁸⁵ We will look at two moments in *Cinéma* to note the effect.

A proud autobiographical account of transformation forms the basis of the second chapter as the protagonist naively summarises his 'coming to maturity'. The narrative tone is at once that of director and actor as Binguel comments on his own metamorphosis: 'Je me surpris à arpenter le couloir du Pavillon avec l'attitude d'un véritable chef de famille... A qui la faute si un gamin comme moi...prenait soudain des airs de commandant de Cercle!' (*Cinéma*, 41). Moving between first and third person indicates his changing position as star and script-writer, conveying his attempt at removed auto-analysis, which we in fact read as deliberately accelerated character development by Monénembo. The immature self-description signals Binguel's active imagination and symbolises what Syrotinski describes as Guinea's 'arrested development'.⁸⁶ In his decisive aim to change from *môme* to *caïd* (kid to big shot) Binguel believes he has matured into a wise and independent adult, yet we see that his 'métamorphose' is limited to

⁸⁴ Michel de Certeau, trans. Steven Rendall, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1984), p. 32.

⁸⁵ Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory*, p. 77.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

superficial role-playing. His ideals are not well-informed, and the majority of his behaviour is but imitation: adopting macho film personae he has seen on screen, and quoting those peers he takes as role-models, who do the same. Rendered overconfident by inexperienced drinking, Binguel's clumsiness stands as a jibe at the exaggerated pomp of the dictator figures so aptly caricatured in *Crapauds* and *Écailles*. As readers, we can have little if any conviction that Binguel has matured when he shoots a local criminal dead (a feat he sees as the pinnacle of macho bravery) (*Cinéma*, 177). What is more, Monénembo's cyclical plot structure – which sees Binguel's last scene echo the book's opening – suggests nothing has changed in this character at all. As a result we give little credence to the purported authenticity of his transformation.

Placing his readers in such a position enables Monénembo to convey the mistrust of the Guinean population of the time. The cinematic frame of the novel leaves readers thus mirroring the scepticism of Guineans who were spectators of the political machinations of 1958; the tone of the whole novel contributes to this positioning of spectator-readers at a sceptical distance from the performance which unfolds. Indeed, the transformation of the town of Mamou is described with the same ironic brevity as Binguel's own metamorphosis. The changes are summarised in only two pages and read like instructions for a scene change:

Maintenant, le commandant de Cercle s'appelait commandant de Région. L'autorail Mistral avait été rhabillé en Alpha Yaya, celui au doux nom de Dauphiné en Samory; la place de France, la place de Guinée, et la librairie Garnier, la librairie Patrice Lumumba (*Cinéma*, 182).

The role of language in sustaining an appearance of transformation is clearly stated; as Ardo explains, one word is simply substituted for another, “C'est

facile... Partout où c'était écrit France, tu remplaces par Guinée,"' (*Cinéma*, 183). Monénembo presents Mamou as a space as changeable as a film set and Guinea's post-independence development as little more than a series of re-painted signs. The reception of the shift to Independence as something done for show, a performance lacking weight or authenticity, is clear: 'du jour au lendemain, la vie rejaillissait pleine d'odeurs et de couleurs, un peu comme un assortiment de fleurs tiré du morne parapluie d'un magicien de foire', (*Cinéma*, 182). Monénembo's critical stance is clear in his description of Sékou Touré ('Boubou Blanc') and Charles de Gaulle ('Général') as no more than cameo actors who appear briefly, playing some kind of role like the attention-seeking Binguel, then disappear after the accolades and the festivities. As Agblemagnon describes the *conte*, so we can describe the performance of this biopic:

Ce jeu, cette mise en scène, cette théâtralisation, cette imagination même ne sont, en un sens, qu'une sorte de répétition pour 'rire', pour 'voir', des mécanismes fondamentaux de la société qui est, de cette manière, réellement démontée, jouée et pas seulement imaginée.⁸⁷

Monénembo's wider commentary on the insubstantial, superficial nature of this period of change is astutely conveyed by the novel's structure, which sets this scene as a somewhat disjointed section, as if the action is cut in order for the scene to be re-set, before things carry on again. Seeing these 'transformation scenes' in juxtaposition highlights both the superficial nature of the changes described, and the imitation and role-playing which is happening from teenagers to presidents. Monénembo's critique of façades that screen uncertainty is effectively drawn out by the cinematic theme, which repeatedly concentrates the reader on acting and performance and also on their own position as sceptical observer, hinting at the disillusionment of the Guinean people.

⁸⁷ Cited in Diagne, p. 126.

Indeed, seeing storytelling as a staging, a fiction, a performance, has paradoxical consequences. As narrative is re-examined in this light, Monénembo reveals the deception of politicians and critiques the fantasy played out by Touré et al. And yet, at the same time, via Binguel, Ardo, and others, the author highlights the creative potential of the imagination. Though it is always responsive, storytelling is not merely reactionary, and originates with the creative energy inherent in the storyteller. Such resourcefulness is a facet of the *débrouillard* character of the nomad mindset so celebrated by Monénembo in his oeuvre. These texts display *débrouillardise* through storytelling as performance and by so doing they both signal the deceptive potential of storytelling and highlight the creative energy of the postcolonial subject. They also continue Monénembo's project to counter homogenising victim narratives, by addressing the complex nature of guilt and responsibility in the postcolonial context, as called for by Mbembe, and as we have just observed in the context of post-genocide writing.⁸⁸ Whence Monénembo's preference for filmic style in *Cinéma*: not only does he provide a positive representation of subjects' creative energy in changing circumstances, but alongside it sustains a critique of the instability of the situation. By depicting mobile characters in space which is under shifting influences, he continues to recast these postcolonial subjects.

The filmscript style of the novel as a whole stands as an object subject to editions, and in this way furthers the representation of Mamou, and postcolonial Guinea, as a volatile structure. Indeed instability is ubiquitous in the novel, and in the connected themes of film and movement Monénembo emphasises 'cette incroyable atmosphère de doute et de tension, les uns s'arc-boutant au passé sans plus y croire et les autres apprenant à rêver sans oser se l'avouer', (*Cinéma*, 184.) Cinema is a

⁸⁸ This call comes in the context of discussing memory and slavery. Mbembe argues that 'slavery is experienced as a wound whose meaning belongs to the domain of the unconscious', and that it must be rethought in a way that addresses the troubling questions of Africans' responsibility and role in it. Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p. 259.

vehicle for Monénembo to remark on the shifting landscape of Guinea under conflicting political and cultural influences: in so doing, the author continues his presentation of the complexity of postcolonial experience, and draws our attention to the *débrouillard* versatility of his subjects. Creative as they are, Monénembo's subjects undeniably inhabit a cultural space shaped by different external forces.

The influence of Western cinema is a persistent allusion to this, indicating as it does the deep-rootedness of exposure to different cultural forms, and the different series of imitations which those engender. Binguel vocalises and embodies the cowboy characters he has seen on screen, imitating their swagger as he frequents bars and tussles outside, he 'effleure consciencieusement le contour du revolver', (*Cinéma*, 28). The gang's nicknames are all taken from the world of cinema (*Oklahoma Kid*, *King-Kong*, *l'Homme de l'Ouest*) and they play out these roles with delight: 'Bouge plus, Oklahoma Kid! Cette fois, c'est moi qui mène le bal!' (28). When Benté decides to punish Linguih for having slept with Lama-Diallo's wife, it is as if the punishment is of second importance to the performance of a brutal Hollywoodesque reprimand: Benté interrogates him with a torch in his eyes, grabs his hair and forces a confession whilst making him eat dirt from the floor. In this scene, Monénembo centres on the shameless tactics of intimidation employed by postcolonial figures, arguably imitating both colonial authorities and post-independence despots. Where the government envoys in *Les Crapauds-brousse* acted in the dark, this is more about a public display of power: a performance which, though consciously displayed, is subconsciously imitative of a fantasy. Without realising it, their primary concern is to impress one another with an enactment of filmic bravado, embodying some notion of macho power imbibed, it would seem, from European and American cinema. Later on, a drunken Binguel emulates the same swagger in response to a wager at the bar:

Ah, je t'envie, je t'admire, toi, l'Homme de l'Ouest, mais peux-tu me
dire si tu peux t'arrêter sur ce tabouret sur un seul pied avec ta
bouteille de bière en équilibre sur ton crâne sans en verser une goutte?
Je parie ma montre. (*Cinéma*, 130)

Binguel succeeds, and wins the watch along with the respect of his delighted spectators. His impersonated bravado is fuelled by his characteristic tendency to *jouer* and delineated by his exposure to certain films. References to Fritz Lang's *Le Tigre du Bengale* and *Le Tombeau hindou* (169), where clichéd encounters of East and West appear in abundance, nod to the colonial influence of the time and reveal further sources of Binguel's fantasy heroism. In performing as a gangster and entertainer in these scenes Binguel displays a creative agency born out in his physical use of body and space, indicating the *débrouillard* capacity of a nomadic mind and exemplifying the way Monénembo's postcolonial subjects condition the space they and others inhabit. Yet at the same time, the author pointedly reveals the impact of Western culture on the small town of Mamou. He does not give a naïve projection of an exclusively African possibility, but a representation of the competing and complex sources of subjects' self-writing, as well as the limitations and possibilities to which these lead. Monénembo is careful to signal the parameters which limit those references resourcing the imagination.

These clashing cultures result in flux and instability – conditions of postcolonial space depicted right across Monénembo's work, and central themes to Noémie Auzas' monograph. 'Ainsi jouets d'événements fous, perdus dans une tourmente qui les dépasse et les emporte, les personnages sont soumis à une insécurité quotidienne. L'univers de référence des romans se trouve précaire, déstructuré.'⁸⁹
As we saw in the previous chapter of this thesis, instability pervades the everyday

⁸⁹ Noémie Auzas, *Tierno Monénembo: une écriture de l'instable* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), p. 31.

and emerges in a number of recurring problems and sites which the critic lists. This tension is no better exemplified than in Binguel's education. Caught between the polar and ineffectual pedagogic strategies of French and Koranic school, Binguel consistently truants, choosing to seek counsel from his streetwise companions. Monénembo paints a critical picture of both education systems. Neither Mademoiselle Saval in the colonial school nor Karamoko at the Islamic school manage to inspire Binguel, and he retains nothing. Discipline, by contrast, flows in abundance: a reminder of the potential for violence, whether public or private, which threatens the surroundings – a sense of volatility due in large part to the uncertainty of looming Independence, and the clashing influences of various (educational, filmic and political) narratives. Layers of culture and ways of being which fit uncomfortably alongside one another create friction and points of tension. Binguel's movement between and (most often) away from these schools is illustrative of negotiating postcolonial space as a response to such shifts and clashes. His mobility and creativity are characteristic of the inventive *débrouillardise* Monénembo presents: at once imposed and utilised.

Finding no source of conversation or inspiration at home, Binguel searches through bins and spies through keyholes 'pour en savoir un peu plus sur les dessous du monde' (*Cinéma*, 102). To him, the horses, cowboys and Indians present a world far more real than that of his family, where 'l'existence paraissait-il si étrange, si insoluble' (101). As well as considering himself the star of his self-narrated film, Binguel sets to making his own world, at once the actor and director. He weaves film into the everyday to enrich and add to the narrative of his existence, displaying a kind of *diversion* in action which indicates the resourcefulness of his imagination. Monénembo foregrounds Binguel as a creative agent of the space he inhabits, and this is in contrast to figures of authority Môdy Djinna his father, Sékou Touré, Monsieur Camille (the French headteacher) who only appear, via

Binguel's narrative, as extras in the background, with all the connotations of superfluousness and insignificance that role holds.

So points of tension are also catalysts for creativity, prompting subjects into empowered and mobile practices. Thus Monénembo's critique of both education systems continues as Binguel takes matters into his own hands and seeks out a kind of heuristic, streetwise education. Ardo, his shoemaker mentor, is seen as the sole imparter of practical knowledge and the one to teach him the *débrouillard* strategies of street life. Thanks to him, Binguel is equipped with a map of understanding to get him around the people and places of Mamou:

Lui, il savait se tirer de tout, même des dures lois divines. Il suffisait, croyait-il, d'apprendre à ruser pour venir à bout de tous les tracas, fussent-ils tombés du ciel. Être fait comme lui était en soi un gage de pouvoir sauver son portefeuille et son âme.' (*Cinéma*, p. 109)

It is significant that Ardo is also a master storyteller, whose words have restorative and comforting power: 'Ses paroles me captivaient... L'écouter me guérissait de tous les maux...' (*Cinéma*, p. 29). Against the colonial and religious establishments, whose shortfalls are made obvious, Monénembo commends this kind of pragmatic, street education. Again this is characterised by a sense of *débrouillard* awareness of the ins and outs of postcolonial space.

A parallel figure of creative wisdom to Ardo comes in *Tribu* in Éyenga: she is the central storyteller and commands most attention on stage. Her creativity is symbolised in the sewing table at which she sits, '*autour d'elle, des piles de tissus et de vêtements, de chiffons, de bobines vides, des bout de fils...*' (*Tribu*, p. 12). She is more economical with her storytelling than Binguel but equally resourceful, making use of scraps available and demonstrating the creativity Monénembo celebrates by forming stories out of different stimuli. She is a centre point amidst

the ladies' fluctuating moods and memories, and as she sings and serves the *koutoukou* she pours creative energy into each scene, drawing them together. Affected undeniably by sadness and loneliness, this mother figure still seeks to be both creative and caring. In *Éyenga*, Monénembo continues to recast the African subject: positioned in the unstable circumstances of living illegally in Paris, *Éyenga* not only negotiates her own difficulties, but provides community for others around her. From her unstable and fraught situation emerges humorous and perceptive storytelling, further evidence of the inherent creativity exercised through *débrouillard* response to shifting circumstances.

As centralised orators, Ardo and *Éyenga* are fictional reflections of Monénembo's own creative endeavours. His recourse to fiction and negotiation of multiple worlds produces stories which critique and entertain. In writing so varied a corpus of texts, he draws inspiration from his autobiographical trajectories, Guinea's oral history, other literary texts, as well as international shifts and events. Writing out of his own points of (linguistic, generic, stylistic) tension, Monénembo demonstrates the nomadic mindset disposed towards creative resourcing, just as we see in his fictional protagonists.

Drama

The author's construction of story is especially notable via specific scenes in *Tribu* which exemplify how he uses language for dramatic effect. Where he creates atmospheres of tension through dramatic devices such as sound and staging, he furthers his representation of postcolonial instability. Action progresses in a mood of tension rising from scene to scene and recurring sounds and lines of speech are integral to the increasing suspense. *Éyenga*'s impatient quizzing about vegetables results in fraught frustration (13, 14, 23...). As she once again asks, 'tu as acheté des gombo?', the reader-audience shares an impatient reaction with the other characters (*Tribu*, 14). The knocking sounds which come from next door at pages

34, 47, 52, 109, 112, 114 and 117 build up tension, and as they increase in frequency they pre-empt an impending tipping point (increased volume and echoes would enhance this on stage). Monénembo does the same in *Attiéké* when tantie's repeated warning cry, 'Antonine, le couteau!', foreshadows a fatal incident with a knife (*Attiéké*, 156).

These specific elements come in the context of texts which in general crescendo in action and narrative towards impending tragedy: *Tribu* ends in a series of revelations then a rush to leave. Unlike *L'Aîné* which is non-linear and structurally disjointed, this text progresses chronologically in a steadily building atmosphere. The passages which precede the ending illustrate Monénembo's use of dramatic creativity in first person narration. There is an increase in urgency as each woman's secret is read from the pages of Samba's diary, until all the written words have been called out aloud. Then tension builds further when Éyenga picks up Kesso's body and frantically tries to pack and leave, vocalising her distress and panic to the onlooking Madame Scarano (*Tribu*, 100, 114).

As well as sound, the positioning of actors is key and as well as indicating characters' territorialising (see Chapter Two), reveals how within the limitations of a small space, Monénembo manipulates space to shift the atmosphere. For example when Kesso is shut behind the bedroom door in Act V, it is her absence which wrests our attention: once more, the scene is undeniably staged. The effect is that the reader-audience is made aware again both of the author's creative agency in using textual space for effect, and also the power at work in being seen or unseen. The fact that the sounds most crucial to building suspense come from invisible places reveals how a combination of senses and theatrical devices creates tension, and mirrors the same tactics used via public displays of intimidation and hidden violence by those in power in real time.

By magnifying aspects of performance, then, we have seen storytelling as a creative response to instability. Monénembo's narrator subjects reveal a complex interface between truth and fiction within stories, one which is unquestionably present in the political figures he criticises. What is more, in its physicality (its present-ness; commanding use of body and space), performance displays an outworking of shape-spacing agency. Monénembo's most dramatized texts emphasise this territorialising here via the spoken word, but as I have shown it is conveyed elsewhere, no less poignantly, via wily game playing and tactics of evasion. There is a response in such self-writing to more sweeping narratives which would homogenise and silence their objects. Finally, performance in Monénembo's texts points once again to the author's commitment to re-cast the African subject as highly reflexive and self-conscious.

The complex experiences of these subjects are reflected in their wily negotiation of multiple (personal, fictive, political, religious, educational, linguistic, temporal) worlds, as we have seen, and their capacity for creative use of language in storytelling. Inter-textually (in Faustin, Binguel and Éyenga) and meta-textually (in Monénembo himself) storytelling goes hand in hand with *débrouillardise*, as subjects respond to shifting circumstances and the instability which emerges from clashing worlds. What Monénembo makes clear is that, across the board, such practices are highly self-conscious. This is why a focus on storytelling as a kind of performative self-writing is so useful: we see in each subject the mechanics and decisions deliberately used to respond to whatever their socio-political circumstances may be, this as part of their reflexive ways of being.

Self-conscious

Unlike currents of thought within Afro-radicalism that Mbembe critiques for lacking self-reflexivity, Monénembo prioritises self-conscious narrative practices. More than victims of their circumstances, his subjects are survivors whose

narratives demonstrate a growing self-knowledge and conscious agency.⁹⁰

Elements of performance in each narrative point to the fictional inventiveness which is at work in what Certeau calls styles, ways of operating and producing.⁹¹ These 'operations' are part of the more 'anthropological and poetic experience of space' lived by subjects 'below the thresholds' of ordinarily visible space: an apt description for Monénembo's protagonists.⁹² *Cinéma* and *Tribu* are the texts which display performance in the most overt and undeniable way. Where in *Cinéma* it is through the overarching filmic discourse which pervades the text, in *Tribu* it is structurally made obvious.

By virtue of its genre, *Tribu* is rife with reminders of the narratives therein being acted, that this is a *représentation*. Its structure explicitly leads the reader through the drama, scene after scene headed by italicised descriptive passages which render this organised progression more obvious. The listed speakers are a perpetual reminder that this is indeed a performance by actors, and echo the cast list that opens the play with a clear delineation of roles (SIA: *Celle qui fait des ménages* OKASSA: *Celle qui cherche un mari blanc...*). In addition, the insertion of parenthesised stage directions among predominantly short interchanges (and several longer monologues) ensures the reader is persistently aware of reading a fictional script.

Beyond the dramatic techniques and obvious structural elements which highlight the construction of *Tribu*, Monénembo has on stage characters who are aware of their capacity for self-writing. The play relates examples of the transatlantic, multilingual processes of re-invention and space-shaping which are necessary for subjects in economically-pressurised, foreign environments. Any critique of French hostility towards immigrants (embodied in Madame Scarano) is paired with a

⁹⁰ Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p. 243.

⁹¹ Certeau, *Practice*, pp. 29-30.

⁹² Ibid., p. 93.

display of defiant self-writing by Éyenga and her friends. Néné Gallé's dramatic entrance is one example: '*Elle fait une grosse chute en entrant. Elle se relève en sautillant de douleur et tente de ramasser des feuilles échappées d'un gros porte-documents.*) Woï yôï! Salut! Woï yôï!' (*Tribu*, p. 21). Once again, Monénembo's chosen focus is on characters as most affected by the space they inhabit, rather than family or origins. In this case, the self-writing practices of a group of immigrant women in Paris are necessarily determined by the need to make money discretely. Yet although each character is somewhat limited by her role, each reinvents it in her own committed way. Thus Néné Gallé (*Celle qui se dit étudiante*) plays the serious, conscientious student and Penda (*Celle qui fait la rue*) talks candidly about her work as a prostitute, both speaking as experts, and as experts at their 'type': both consciously theatrical and at the same time pragmatic in responding to her situation. Monénembo plays on these delineated roles to emphasise once more each speaker's practices of self-invention, newly necessary in places far from home but creatively undertaken: again matching *débrouillardise* with creativity.

Conclusion

The deliberately performed nature of these stories displays the role of fiction in every narrative, as well as showing the power held by storytelling subjects. As Mbembe argues, resistance to colonialism took on (race) categories from existing paradigms, and concentrated on power struggles without engaging with more general questions of subjectivity.⁹³ Yet here, Monénembo recasts those subjects as complex and multifaceted. He does so by placing them in shifting worlds, addressing mobility, inter-generational responsibility, money and corruption, and the clashes of European and African influences. In response we witness storytelling done inventively with ruse and self-awareness. Monénembo's magnified focus on narrative agency in these texts forms a key part of that recasting, as he moves

⁹³ Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-writing', p. 263.

beyond single categories of race and victimhood to highlight that storytelling is self-conscious and highly creative. Such a perspective engenders a re-viewing of storytelling at multiple levels, especially those narratives backgrounded by Monénembo. With this critical perspective on storytelling as a starting point, for example, truth-searching European journalists are re-read as manipulating suffering by fictionalising it, as with Rodney in *L'Aîné*, and Sékou Touré's showy independence campaign is re-read as naïve and intentional role-play. Using Mamou as a microcosm for the nation, Monénembo portrays Independence as little more than a diversion or renovation in the story of Guinea, as directed by absent holders of power. In his dissatisfaction with pre- and post- colonial politics in Guinea, Monénembo appeals to narrative agency by displaying in his characters a mimetic representation of the power inherent in each postcolonial subject, himself included. We are able to see in his fictional narrative performances the outworking of such agency through the physical use of body and space and self-conscious role-playing (as seen above), as well as at a meta-textual level, the construction of the dramatic effects created by the author himself.

One conclusion we draw from this creative resourcing is that it points to an unlimited wealth of potential. Even when characters are limited physically, like the women in the flat in Paris, or Faustin on trial, Monénembo points out their capacity for imagination, adding further to his depiction of consciously creative postcolonial figures. If a subject has the capacity for such creative dynamism then the possibilities for narrative invention are vast indeed. This is of course empowering because it speaks in the face of circumstances which might indicate an impossibility for change, or an inevitability to suffering, as well as countering discourses which rely on hiding or silencing the 'victim' subjects they present. Rather, creative storytelling points to an innovative resourcefulness on the part of the narrating subject, and a vast bank of resources to use in imaginative projects.

Moments of potency and hopefulness on stage, screen and in the text show for example

there is a potential for resisting bureaucratic, dehumanizing portrayals of refugee trauma, for undercutting a media driven appetite for suffering and spectacle, for supporting communities to celebrate cultural identities, for activism and agency, and for offering a vision of our collective, human capacity for survival and transformation.⁹⁴

In order to see these, we must move beyond depictions limited to pain and solitude and instead draw out elements of play and mobility which address the communal aspect of every story told whilst also revealing the imaginative mobility of narrator subjects.

The very creativity used in these instances signals the seemingly endless possibilities for future aspiration and action on the part of the narrating subject. Monénembo celebrates the narrative energy inherent in each narrator by emphasising the dynamic and dialogic nature of storytelling. Rather than homogeneous or silenced groups, in these texts individual personalities emerge with their own narrative resources, interacting with cooperative listeners who collectively form each narrative. Storytelling here is undeniably communal, creative and mobile. However this assessment comes in the same pages as a steady critique of the circumstances in which we find such creative subjects. The instability and difficulty which dominates postcolonial space and forces *débrouillard* response is clearly laid out by Monénembo, who is committed to acknowledging and critiquing the problems which continue to plague such spaces.

⁹⁴ Michael Balfour and Nina Woodrow, 'On Stitches', in *Refugee Performance*, ed. by Balfour, p. 28.

In the first part of this chapter, I explored how in *L'Aîné des orphelins* Monénembo writes a post-genocide text which is pre-emptive in the way it decries violence whilst grounding it in the turbulent state of the modern African city. Monénembo achieves a unique contribution to writing on the genocide by centralising a protagonist who is both traumatised and implicated, as an *enfant survivant*. Considering the communal, physical, playful, creative, dramatic and self-conscious elements of narrative in these works by Monénembo we have seen how an emphasis on performance persists in his renewal of African subjectivity. In the second part of this chapter we have seen this in two specific ways. Firstly, in seeing the versatile narrative practices of Monénembo's protagonists, who persist in proving ready responders to those people and situations around them, the post-colonial African subject (variously genocide survivor, immigrant, and post-Independence adolescent) emerges as consciously and creatively shaping her/his world. Simultaneously, the layers of fiction and invention which appear in such a study sharpen our eyes to game-playing and acting, leading to a re-examination of the authenticity of any and every narrative, including those which appear official (such as Touré's promises for Independence) but extending to those survivor characters who also command our sympathy (such as the traumatised and dishonest Faustin). This informs our understanding of the shifting physical and political terrain of surviving trauma, living through the formation of new nation-states, and living as an immigrant. We turn in the next chapter to Monénembo's exiled protagonists to explore what further effects shifting locations and perspectives have on narrative and postcolonial experience. The (changing) position of the writer in time and space profoundly impacts her/his writing, and we will address this via retrospective narratives and stories of exile.

Chapter Four: Ruptures and Remembering

***Un Rêve utile* (1991), *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* (1993), *Pelourinho* (1995), and *Le Terroriste noir* (2012)**

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine four of Monénembo's remaining novels to investigate his representation of various forms of exile. Motifs of movement and journey run right through the author's work, but in these texts are tied to real instances of transnational exile, and thus work beyond any symbolic value to relate to us, in addition, parts of the author's own meandering biography. In *Un Rêve utile* (1991), a young Guinean negotiates tough city life in Lyon having fled his native country. In *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* (1993), a group of displaced young Guineans traverse the capital of neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. With *Pelourinho* (1995) Monénembo follows a young man from West Africa to Brazil as he journeys in search of relatives whose heritage leads back to the 18th century transportation of slaves. *Le Terroriste noir* (2012) sees the posthumous honouring of a *tirailleur sénégalais* from Guinea as he is remembered by villagers who lived alongside him in the Vosges. Exile, in each of these cases, is an experience of distancing and separation: different types of journey all engender loss, whether that is loss of home, security, freedom or life.

In Chapter One I cited a number of epigraphs which come from Peul mythology. Another mythological theme that features in *Peuls* is the splitting of a primeval ancestor; and this is visible in many texts addressing African origins.¹ As we come full circle now in the final chapter of the thesis, I would like to show how this original rupture is a precedent for further displacements and separations that condition both subjects and narratives, repeated as it is in the ruptures enforced by

¹ Daniel Orrells, 'Oedipus in Africa: Mudimbe and classical antiquity', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 18 (2015), 235-262.

exile, migration, and death. This is another example of Monénembo blurring the distinction between past and present, discussed in the context of historical rewritings in Chapter One. This kind of splitting is thus shown not only as a starting point, but also as a springboard for mobility, and, crucially, also as a creative process that produces subjects. In the very act of separating, where there is loss, there is also inevitably the production of new encounters (between subjects and spaces). This motif of separation and loss pervades Monénembo's texts in his use of language and depiction of space, and constitutes the shared experience of many of his subjects. Exile is particularly relevant given the author's own experiences, having left Guinea aged twenty two to flee Touré's increasingly despotic regime. The relationship between his real life trajectories and their fictional inscription will be assessed in the conclusion of this thesis.

I have shown throughout the thesis how instability is a defining characteristic of the spaces Monénembo depicts. In Chapter One, the peripatetic movements of Peul people and the threat of inter-tribal violence over territory marked Peul history as precarious and unpredictable; Olivier de Sanderval was first victim to then master of the ruse required to negotiate such space. In Chapter Two, violence and volatility conditioned space under dictatorship, leading to wily practices of domination and resistance as subjects responded to insidious emergences of power. In Chapter Three, the capacity of characters to enact *débrouillardise* through narratives revealed them as changeable subjects, not limited to notions of victimhood or childhood that might not account fully for their complexity and agency. In this chapter it is exile which is, as Auzas describes, 'un élément fondamental d'un vécu de l'instable'.²

² Noémie Auzas, *Tierno Monénembo: Une Écriture de l'instable* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004), p. 36.

Exile is defined as a prolonged, usually enforced absence from one's home or country, or the expulsion of a person from her/his native land by official decree.³ It will become clear that 'home' and 'land' are fluctuating notions whose definitions are reshaped through new understandings of belonging: these shift for exiles, as for all nomad subjects. Benedict Anderson has shown senses of communal identity formed by shared processes of both remembering and forgetting.⁴ In this chapter I examine Monénembo's specifically nomadic imaginings as always mobile and dynamic, yet marked by loss. What is also clear is that exile can be experienced in many different forms. Sélom Gbanou describes exile more as a process than a state or momentary rupture. It is rather the gradual widening of distance between homeland and person, 'une distance qui se creuse dans l'espace et dans le corps au fur et à mesure que le temps passe'.⁵ There are various nuances to the definition of exile above. Geographically, one can be forced out of a nation, but also out of a city, village, or compound, indeed outside of any bordered zone. Equally there may be instances of social exile where a subject is not removed physically but forced into social isolation when excluded by others. A similar experience of isolation can occur through linguistic exile, where a subject is in a position where the mother tongue cannot be used. There is of course the distinction between voluntary departure and enforced expulsion: under Touré's dictatorship circumstances were such that many opponents were forced into exile abroad. It is unlikely, of course, that such departures were described in official accounts as enforced.

Two other features determine any experience of exile: first, whether or not exile happens individually or in a group. Edem Awumey highlights the shift from communal to singular senses of the self which must occur in cases of isolated exile, and I will pick up on this when discussing the positive configurations of

³ Collins Dictionary.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 198.

⁵ Sélom Gbanou, 'Tierno Monénembo: La Lettre et l'exil', *Tangence*, 71 (2003), 41-61.

community which can follow such an experience. Monénembo's characters, excluded though they are, never remain isolated for extended periods of time, and in this the author indicates the reconceptualisations of self and other which can lead to positive new encounters. Secondly, there is a common experience of psychological exile. That is, feeling uprooted, homeless, lost, and unsettled, and with a tendency to *think back on* past times and locations. Such processes of remembering, I will show, are central to Monénembo's depiction of spaces of exile. But there is equally in his writing the attempt to mirror those psychological experiences of disorientation such that the reader, through form as well as content, captures some of what exile entails.

Monénembo threads each of these aspects through these four novels, where displacement and journeying is rife. Loss is a central theme, and I will address the actual and symbolic losses that Monénembo's characters suffer in these novels. In typical Monénembo fashion, grounding his narratives in hardship and precarious circumstances frees them from the kinds of overly metaphorical or romanticised descriptions of nomad subjects for which Braidotti amongst others have been accused (see Chapter One). These novels are not travel diaries, but accounts of meandering ways of being which are engendered by initial and ongoing ruptures and losses. The *débrouillard* mindset Monénembo's subjects possess, I will demonstrate, is a result of their situations of exile.

As with *L'Aîné* and *Tribu* in the previous chapter, this chapter addresses texts set outside of Guinea. These four novels span the past seventy five years, and are based in France, Brazil, and the Ivory Coast. This breadth is, once again, indicative of Monénembo's prioritising of space within an oeuvre that addresses common experiences in a globalised world. Though in different locations, his subjects experience similar dislocations, and patterns emerge of *débrouillard*, creative responses which look to establish new forms of community and home. With the

cartography of his whole work, Monénembo continues to map, as Certeau describes, processes of subjects who shape their own space, selecting and using it, making space ‘exist and emerge’.⁶ As I will examine below, Monénembo’s conveying of ruptures and rememberings in globalised postcolonial spaces show exile subjects reconfiguring city and countryscapes with their ways of being. Between transatlantic contexts, nomadic thought emerges again as a common element behind the parallels which I draw.

After outlining briefly the plot of each novel, the chapter will proceed as follows. The spatial and experiential backdrop which is weighed heavy with the suffering of exile must be emphasised before any analysis of its creative potential. This being so, I will first demonstrate how Monénembo inscribes the pain and fracture of exiles of various forms in each of these novels. Then I will move on to highlight the aesthetic freedom available to those in exile, though this is of course limited. I will show how the fictional characters enact creative agency, showing evidence of nomadic thought in the way they respond to their circumstances with heightened awareness, learning, and the configuration of new relationships and narratives.

Un Rêve utile (1991), Monénembo’s third novel, marks a move away from the engaged critiques which were my focus in Chapter Two. Set in the early 1970s, a young Guinean arrives in Lyon having left his home country after his father’s execution. Integrating into a community of young African immigrants, he narrates it from the inside: his exiled counterparts and their various challenges and interactions are seen close up. *Un Attiéké pour Elgass* (1993) is the author’s next published work, and though a novel, reads like a play. Unity of place, time, and action are observed to create a stage for the action which unfolds, narrated by Badio, again amongst a group of exiled young Guineans. Monénembo’s

⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: California University Press, 1984), p. 98.

magnetised focus on the city of ‘Bidjan’ exaggerates the sense of drama as a party intended as a send-off for one of the group ends in disaster. *Pelourinho* (1995) sees an inversion of the Afrocentrist return to origins as Monénembo continues his reframing of African subjecthood. Two narrators alternate chapter by chapter to piece together the story of the nameless protagonist, who has travelled from West Africa to Brazil in search of relatives and tragically been killed when mistaken for a wealthy tourist. It is through dialogic recollection that this narrative journey of post-mortem memorialisation happens.

These three novels, together with *Cinéma* (1997) define the 1990s as a decade of nostalgia for Monénembo. In each one can be read traces of his own journeys, time in France, Ivory Coast, and Brazil. Memory dominates, as characters respond to their relative losses with dialogue and recollection. I will demonstrate below that though these encounters and memories do not fill the voids left by separation, displacement and death, they go some way to create new senses of home and community, and are therefore evidence of the creativity which is arguably triggered by these various exiles. Catherine Mazauric groups the three aforementioned novels under examination here within a ‘trilogie exilique’. Drawing on their common urban settings, and the parallel of young Guineans travelling abroad, she excellently shows how displaced characters reinvent their new locations.⁷

Le Terroriste noir (2012), the most recent of Monénembo’s publications to be studied in this thesis, shares these features too. Addi Bâ, a forgotten wartime hero, is remembered by an old lady who knew him as an adolescent. The time of publication pointedly precedes the centenary of the First World War with an act of re-writing which centralises a black Muslim as forgotten hero; the book’s title directly speaking to contemporary European politics. As regards exile, setting this

⁷ Catherine Mazauric, ‘Fluidités urbaines: la trilogie exilique’, in Bernard de Meyer and Papa Samba Diop, eds. ‘Tierno Monénembo et le roman: Histoire, exil, écriture’, *Littératures et cultures francophones hors d’Europe* 8 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 117-134.

text in the rural context of the Vosges, France, Monénembo shows that the invention and creativity Mazaauric locates in cities is not exclusively urban. A posthumous remembering like *Pelourinho* highlights the relationship between absence and storytelling. And the story is of a triple exile: Addi Bâ travelled as a wartime soldier to Europe, was then an outsider rejected from the village when isolated from his battalion, and then erased from France's national memory after the war. These are personal stories written by Monénembo to achieve the kind of rewriting I detailed in Chapter One. In this way *Terroriste* brings me back to where I began, giving evidence of Monénembo's project of re-writing to challenge accepted narratives of the past and bringing historically marginalised figures back into the centre of our view.

It should already be clear, then, that journeys, and their accompanying ruptures, are central to these four texts. The nomadic subjectivity described in previous chapters is on show in physical movements between parts of cities, between countries and continents. In *Rêve*, the protagonist-narrator exchanges places with a French friend Gilles, who travels to Guinea. In Lyon, the narrator traverses the city, at the same time giving a sense of the movements undertaken to, fro, and within it by other immigrant subjects. In *Attiéké* the youngsters spend most of the day travelling across the city in buses, having gone to the Ivory Coast, where 'l'exil nous a disloqués' (p. 18). Idjatou's forthcoming departure hovers ominously over the text, determining the dialogue, and largely diverting attention from the past and present into a projected future in Brussels. In *Pelourinho*, Escritore (the dead protagonist) has flown from West Africa to Salvador, Bahia, seemingly the horizon of hope. He ends his life in the gutter of the eponymous labyrinthine district of the city. And *Terroriste* recounts its protagonist-hero's long journey from Guinea to France where he is imprisoned by Germans with fellow *tirailleurs sénégalais* then escapes into the Vosges countryside. In Monénembo's own words, the journey of Addi Bâ,

this protagonist, completes that of Olivier de Sanderval in *Le Roi de Kahel*. They move in opposite directions, the former leaving Africa to participate in the history of France, and the latter leaving France to play a part in West Africa's history.⁸

Many kinds of journey feature in Monénembo's work. The circumstances of each character's journey are different, but in journeying each experiences certain losses and separations in departure, and a need to negotiate unfamiliar spaces. Something is broken with on the point of leaving, and ideas of belonging and home have to be reformed. The sometimes violent and always precarious contexts in which they are then situated place these accounts undeniably far from ideas of nomadism as glamorous jetsetting or purely metaphorical. These are grounded in real stories, be they the author's own or others he wishes to draw in from the margins of historiography. Their various exiles have different causes, distances from home, and nuances, which Monénembo inscribes in four very different texts.

Where each of these novels treats a distinct location and set of experiences, it is my aim in this chapter, by drawing out their parallels, to show how the theme of exile elucidates loss and displacement. The disparate journeys are all taken by exiled Guineans, and there is a common trend of remembering those or that which is absent. I will show how Monénembo exhibits this in language, the primacy of space, and acts of remembering, and then, following the pattern of Chapter Two, how subjects respond to these experiences by enacting creative agency.

Suffering and loss

In Chapter One I outlined some of the concerns raised against using the experience of nomads in overly metaphorical ways. Similar opposition arises regarding exile.

In writing about the exile of post-war German writers in the United States, David

⁸ Jean-François Cadet, '*Le Terroriste noir* de Tierno Monénembo: 'Je suis là pour raconter une histoire'', in 'Vous m'en direz des nouvelles', RFI, 25/09/2012
<<http://www.rfi.fr/france/20120925-le-terroriste-noir-tierno-monenembo-je-suis-raconter-une-histoire>> [accessed 20 June 2015].

Kettler's concern is that such an experience not be reduced to a mere symbol, a literary *topos* which is removed from the horror of real life.⁹ Domnica Radulescu heeds the same warning in the concluding chapter of *Realms of Exile: Nomadism, Diasporas and Eastern European Voices* when she writes that we must think about what is experiential and physical as well as the symbolic and metaphorical.¹⁰ Certainly this urge to ground writing on exile in lived experience must be applied to Postcolonial African literature, where it might be tempting to dissolve such stories into wider discussions of travel writing or transnational diasporas. In drawing parallels between the transatlantic stories covered in these four texts, I do not seek to simplify the complexities and singularities of different experiences. Rather, as in the prior chapters of this thesis, I seek to draw from the experiential and physical to assess common responses in nomad subjects. Creative and wily practices define the ways of being of Monénembo's characters, without ignoring the extensive losses and difficulties they experience.

Edward Said has been criticised for presenting an all too romanticised view of exile, particularly for his mention of the pleasure and success which can be enjoyed through a state of homelessness.¹¹ His argument for freeing criticism from the interests of the homeland by locating it in the shifting space of dislocation comes in tension with his desire to 'home' criticism in specific places, enhancing it through 'worldliness'.¹² This recalls the similar disputes around nomad thought I outlined in the Introduction and Chapter One. But his argument is more balanced than such a critique suggests, and does emphasise the unbearable suffering of exile, which is 'produced by human beings for other human beings; and...like death but

⁹ David Kettler, 'The Symbolic Uses of Exile' in *Exile and Otherness: New Approaches to the Experience of the Nazi Refugees*, ed. Alexander Stephan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005).

¹⁰ Domnica Radulescu, 'Theorizing Exile' in *Realms of Exile: Nomadism, Diasporas and Eastern European Voices*, ed. Domnica Radulescu (Lanham; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002) p. 188.

¹¹ Beatrice von Bormann, in *Exile and Otherness*, ed. Stephan, p. 186.

¹² Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

without death's ultimate mercy...has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography'.¹³ There is nothing unhuman (in the sense of overly theoretical or removed from real experience) in Monénembo's portrayal of exiled subjects. What is needed, and what can be found in these four novels, is a range of accounts from exiles: a combination of testimony, autobiography, memories, and linguistic innovation. In these ways the author writes to show how those elements of tradition, family, and geography are reconfigured by nomad subjects, all grounded in a strong sense of everyday unstable space. This attends to Braidotti's priority of locating nomad subjects in actual geopolitical spaces, where they are affected by things out of their control.¹⁴ Said writes that 'the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever', and I begin with Monénembo's representation of loss.¹⁵

Monénembo expresses exile with exceptional lucidity. Obviously building on the foundation of his own experiences, he is personally informed, and knows Abidjan, Salvador, and Lyon from the inside. However there is a striking lack of nostalgia in these texts: unlike the often tender sequences in *Cinéma* which affectionately recall the author's adolescence, *Rêve* and *Attiéké* are less wistful. Monénembo's characters do not long for an idyllic past in any Negritude-like imagining of a perfect homeland. Nor do they sink into self-pity, complaining about what once was. Indeed, in *Attiéké* the friends are under no illusion about the Guinea they have left behind: 'saloperie d'indépendance, c'est même plus un pays' (*Attiéké*, 47). There is instead a pragmatic and overt acknowledgement of what has been lost, and a focus on surviving the consequences. *Rêve* and *Attiéké* take place very much in the present, and *Pelourinho* and *Terroriste* reconfigure their protagonists with

¹³ Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 174.

¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 4.

¹⁵ Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p. 137.

present day narratives. Thus the author further develops his project, re-casting the African subject as more *débrouillard* than victim, and defined more by present contexts than established discourses from the past. In so doing, he saturates the storylines with undeniable losses, so as to make clear the dominant presence of absence, in these postcolonial spaces. I will list a number of examples to illustrate my point.

Lost home

Bill Ashcroft has recently observed that postcolonial writing is often suffused with hope for the future.¹⁶ Indeed this looking forwards is characteristic of nomad subjects who, whilst looking back to what is lost, are used to dislocation and innovation, and look to create new senses of belonging. As Ashcroft describes, this projected home might not have a permanent location but will definitely have a recurring form, and one which is helpfully contained in Ernst Bloch's term *Heimat*. That is, in imagining a different world, subjects cling to a strong yet unknown sense of home, or *Heimat*, the promise of which has the potential to transform the present.¹⁷ This recalls Braidotti's description of nomad subjects borrowing energy from the future to change the here and now.¹⁸ Thus we see home and belonging as ever lost and then recaptured through imagining and creating new, temporary, forms of belonging.

Monénembo undoes a definition of home as nation since all the protagonists in these four novels are separated from their native place of belonging. Escritore wanders around the streets of Pelourinho trying to pin down his origins but finding himself lost in the process. The sense of a lost time is engraved in the architecture

¹⁶ Chantal Zabus, ed. *The Future of Postcolonial Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 255.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti 'Thinking as a Nomadic Subject', Lecture (Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, 7 October 2014).

of the neighbourhood, from which subjects feel alienated, and ironically none more so than Escritore right as he seeks an anchor in the past.

Il faudrait un autre cœur pour vivre ici pleinement.

Un autre cœur, un autre odorat, une autre façon de

marcher. Ces maisons, ces arbres, ces clochers

souillés d'or et de sang expriment une autre

époque, avant, comment dire, avant que ne

s'instaure l'ère du bluff, de l'à-peu-près, du fugitif

(*Pelourinho*, 116).

To decipher these layers, the ways of being that the space requires, is too much for the foreigner. Leaving the safety of known places he walks into danger. The Brazilian city is unfamiliar to him and its hostility is fatal. For Addi Bâ in *Terroriste* he has lost multiple homes: the geographical familiarity of his homeland, Guinea, is contrasted with the harsh rural winter he lives through abandoned in the Vosges; he leaves West Africa to work in France and is then separated from his army regiment during the second world war and remains alone until accepted by a few of the villagers (the narrator included). The young exiles in *Rêve* and *Attiéké* experience a similar loss of *Heimat*, familiarity, and belonging. Though streaked with irony, their recollections for Ifrikyia/Afrique are tinged with nostalgia, 'J'ai mal à mon Afrique, oui docteur' (*Rêve*, 131). Their behavioural and linguistic responses are detailed below.

These series of losses, and in particular Escritore's transatlantic journey, echo the vast scale of loss in slave history. History, as I set out in the first chapter of this thesis, always features somewhere in Monénembo's texts, whether centrally or in the margins. Here it is overtly referenced, not only in Escritore's journey which by being voluntary highlights the enforced nature of slaves' historical journey across

the ocean. Additionally, the novel's setting in Pelourinho and its eponymous title draw attention to the historical inscriptions in the Brazilian landscape. Pelourinho, a district of Salvador de Bahia, in North East Brazil, is both the memorial site of the transatlantic slave trade and one of America's oldest slave markets, and as is seen through the novel, a centre for tourism because of this very African heritage.¹⁹ 'Pelourinho' is also the term used in Portuguese to refer to Peul, or Fulani, people, a nomadic people group originating in West Africa who first came to North East Brazil during the slave trade, and the same group whose space must be negotiated by Olivier de Sanderval in *Le Roi de Kahel*. Given the signalling of the title, we better understand its significance for the novel's protagonist, and the primacy of space in this novel is evident from the outset. Additionally in Portuguese, the word refers to the pillory to which slaves would be tied when whipped/flogging. As he literally retraces their steps over the cobbled winding streets of the district, once again Monénembo uses the primacy of space to locate an exploration of history.

Lost past

A great deal has of course been written on French national amnesia regarding its former colonies. More recent innovations in commemorative projects have worked on redressing such an imbalance, for example the webdocumentaries *17 octobre 1961* and *La Nuit oubliée* which seek to retell silenced stories from the massacre of Algerians on that date in Paris.²⁰ Within his postcolonial project Monénembo is often concerned with emphasising underacknowledged elements of this transnational history. In *Pelourinho* the dedication to Dakar-based anthropologist Pierre Verger shows that his dialogue with anthropology persists alongside his commitment to rewrite histories. The novel form allows for a focus on single characters' trajectories which reveals just how the big stories of history (slavery,

¹⁹ When I leave this word unitalicised, I refer to the neighbourhood.

²⁰ <<http://www.politis.fr/17octobre1961/>> and <http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/visuel/2011/10/17/la-nuit-oubliee_1587567_3224.html>.

colonialism, dictatorship, world wars) impact individuals. It is through his consistent attention to nomadic subjectivity that the author achieves a re-casting of African subjects within the frames of these wider stories, depicting them not only as victims but as complex agents shaping their space. As Monénembo describes people whose character and achievements have been marginalised, misrepresented, or erased in previous historiography, he himself reshapes the textual geography of francophone writing. His role, as he describes it, is that of a storyteller rather than a historian, drawing inspiration from fact but not being restrained by it.²¹ Unsung heroes reclaim lost pasts as celebrated protagonists in his fiction. This is what he does with Addi Bâ, like he did with Olivier de Sanderval in *Roi*.

Born in 1916, Addi Bâ, or Mamdou Hady Bah, was called the ‘terroriste noir’ by the Germans he fought against in the Second World War. Having been brought to France by the colonist who adopted him, he joins the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to fight in the Ardennes and is captured by German troops near the Meuse in 1940. Escaping with a number of his comrades, Addi is separated from them and takes refuge near Tollaincourt, a village in the Vosges. In March 1943 he creates what is thought to be the first maquis of the region, and leads and trains a group of villagers to fight in the Resistance. He is caught, tortured, and shot dead in December of the same year. It takes until July 2003 for France to recognise Bâ’s contribution publicly, and he receives a posthumous honour in the form of a Resistance medal and a plaque. Monénembo’s novel consists of an elderly lady (an adolescent at the time of the Resistance) telling the story to Bâ’s nephew, who is visiting from Guinea for the ceremony. A street in Langeais, where he lived before the war, was named after him in 1991. Monénembo’s commitment to the ‘devoir de mémoire’ and an interrogation of official commemoration is as obvious with this novel as it was with *L’Aîné des orphelins*.

²¹ Cadet, ‘*Le Terroriste noir* de Tierno Monénembo’.

A huge literature on the *tirailleurs* serves to counter the disinterest which has stood as a historical feature of French colonial relations. Monénembo's work of remembering stands alongside many others collectively acknowledging those 'mort pour la France'. Among others, Léopold Sédar Senghor's poem 'Tyaroye' in *Hosties noires* and Boubacar Boris Diop's play *Thiaroye terre rouge* indicate the need for different genres to represent the *tirailleurs*' untold stories.²² Their repatriation without pay or honour has been depicted in Rachid Bouchareb's 2005 film *L'Ami Ya Bon*.²³ More recent publications include Raymond Escholier's collection of letters from the front, *Avec les tirailleurs sénégalais 1917-1919*, Marc Michel's *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre*, published in the centenary year of the First World War, and Sabrina Parent's sensitive exploration of remembering Thiaroye in *Cultural Representations of Massacre*.²⁴

Le Terroriste noir achieves to some extent a reversal of the political *blanchiment* commanded by Charles de Gaulle in 1944, and their subsequent historiographical *blanchiment*, a fact emphasised by the choice of title. Monénembo's purpose in writing to reinstate Bâ and this village story into the consciousness of the Francophone readership fits well alongside other recent missions to counter the established historiography on the *tirailleurs*. Armelle Mabon, French historian, has worked tirelessly to discover the fates of those who were forgotten and betrayed by France at the end of the war.²⁵ She traces the captivity as prisoners of war of soldiers from North and sub-Saharan Africa, Indochina and elsewhere and highlights the huge discrepancies between their treatment and that of native French

²² Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Hosties noires* (Paris: Seuil, 1948); Boubacar Boris Diop, *Le Temps de Tamago; suivi de Thiaroye terre rouge* (Paris: Harmattan, 1981).

²³ Rachid Bouchareb, *L'Ami Ya Bon* (2005).

²⁴ Raymond Escholier, *Avec les Tirailleurs sénégalais 1917-1919: lettres inédites du Front Orient* (Paris: Harmattan, 2013); Marc Michel, *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre: l'appel à l'Afrique (1914-1918)* (Paris: Karthala, 2014); Sabrina Parent, *Cultural Representations of Massacre: Reinterpretations of the Mutiny of Senegal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

²⁵ Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre 'indigènes': visages oubliés de la France occupée*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

soldiers. Ambiguities surrounding their repatriation have drawn Mabon to an extended focus on the documentation of those processes in official French records. In her archival research, she has uncovered evidence of discrepancies and falsified documents regarding the remuneration of a company of *tirailleurs* at Thiaroye. The contentious occasion, subject of Ousmane Sembene's 1988 film *Camp de Thiaroye*, where thirty five *tirailleurs* were killed by French army officials and many others injured, has recently been named a 'répression sanglante' by François Hollande, after seventy years of being labelled a mutiny.²⁶ Mabon's findings are outlined in a comprehensive dossier and were discussed in a meeting with Hollande on 30th November 2014.²⁷

So in this wave of rewriting history and centralising the stories of forgotten individuals, *Le Terroriste noir* stands as a key literary contribution. In it the author revitalises not only the protagonist but those others who illustrate the everyday heroism of the French Resistance, perhaps otherwise forgotten in the depths of the countryside. Once again Monénembo works to recall the past via captivating, personal narratives which speak of creativity and community, not just oppression and defeat. The losses suffered by Bâ (loss of home, loss of comrades, loss of freedom, loss of life, loss of merited honour) are acknowledged in the space of Monénembo's text, and his character portrayal re-humanises and honours the fallen soldier, thus ensuring a portrayal which counters the ironically chosen title. Monénembo makes a timely point that this so-called Muslim 'terrorist' (who fell at the hands of the Nazis and was hitherto forgotten by the French) was a noble leader central to defending France.

²⁶ François Hollande, speech in Dakar, 12/10/2012 <http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/verbatim-le-discours-de-francois-hollande-a-dakar-12-10-2012-1516395_24.php> [accessed 27 August 2015].

²⁷ 'Synthèse sur le massacre de Thiaroye (Senegal, 1 décembre 1944)', (Unpublished, October 2014); personal correspondance.

Lost people

The silencing or absence of facts has led Mabon and others to uncover details about the *tirailleurs* and form those into coherent narratives.²⁸ Similarly, the absence or erasure of *life* in *Pelourinho* and *Terroriste* provokes an uncovering and retelling of stories about those no longer present. This pattern is examined below but now it is interesting to underline that these stories only in fact happen because of the deaths. When Escritore is killed in *Pelourinho* the two narrators begin a dialogue to tell the story of this mysterious visitor. In *Terroriste*, too, it is for the uninformed nephew that narrator Germaine tells stories about Addi, who himself is long dead and thus unable to speak for himself. A post-mortem series of reminiscences only happens because of the death: the absence both provides space for and provokes communal recollecting and dialogic narratives. Where death, or the erasure in historiography of certain important parts of a story, presents a danger of amnesia or writing out certain elements of a story, personalised narratives work against these to speak it back into being. This is not a replacement for the absent truth, person, or life, but a creative narrative process of remembering. This is one example of the primacy of memory in recent postcolonial studies and I write more on the attention Monénembo gives to it below.

In *Attiéké* the absent figure is not dead, but haunts the space of the text and city nonetheless. Elgass is the older brother of Idjatou (whose goodbye party is the destination of the novel's wanderings and the climax of the plot). He is also an older brother figure to the others in the group, looked up to for his unmatched knowledge and wisdom. He is referenced as a sort of poet-philosopher, 'Elgass n'avait pas son pareil' (*Attiéké*, 28). More than this though, Elgass stands for that

²⁸ See also Etienne Guillermond, *Addi Bâ, Résistant des Vosges* (Paris: Duboiris, 2013) and Guillermond's website dedicated to Bâ's story <<http://addiba.free.fr/accueil.html>> [accessed 28 August 15]. The seventieth anniversary of the Thiaroye massacre saw it receive heightened attention in France. For example, a symposium took place at l'Université de Bretagne Sud in November 2014. Details of the programme and media coverage are available here: <<https://massacresetrepressions.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 28 August 15].

sense of *Heimat* which is dislodged with exile, and the rupture of significant relationships when loved ones are divided. The novel's title echoes honours of a legendary figure who is dead or absent, and the *attiéké* refers to a dish prepared and shared in his name. This meal sees the coming together of the political exiles, but just as it painfully gives a taste of community it is simultaneously the point where betrayal and lies are revealed. Of all that is lost in the series of separations brought about by exile, the anguish for distance and separation from loved ones (whether through distance or death) is the most serious. I come to Monénembo's representation of the effects now.

In these texts, Monénembo does not posit straightforward replacements for what is lost. Where Audrey Small claims *Pelourinho* is based on a quest for a 'whole self', I argue that the fragmentary inscription of loss across Monénembo's novels denies even the possibility of such a quest.²⁹ There is almost constant reference to the instabilities of an exilic existence, and as Radulescu insists, the author attends not only to the experiential and physical, but the symbolic and metaphorical implications.³⁰ Gaps are acknowledged in his writing almost constantly, and only alongside these absences is anything new created. I will come to this further below. Monénembo inscribes these voids and losses in three primary ways: in language, in his depiction of space, and in a focus on remembering.

Inscribing loss

Monénembo's nomadic writing style finds fresh expression in these novels of exile. A sense of movement pervades the texts, and emerges in each of the three elements to be examined immediately below. This is to convey that exile, journey, and loss are not momentary happenings, but ongoing. They have an ongoing effect

²⁹ Audrey Small, 'Reversals of Exile: Williams Sassine's *Wirriyamu* and Tierno Monénembo's *Pelourinho*', *African Studies Review*, 57:3 (2014), 41-54 (p. 46).

³⁰ Domnica Radulescu, *Realms of Exile: Nomadism, Diasporas and Eastern European Voices* (Lanham; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 188.

on subjects: nobody seems settled or sedentary, or anchored in notions of home tied to a nation. Transcending the France-Africa binary for instance in *Pelourinho* and *Les coqs cubains chantent à minuit*, the author shifts our attention to more complicated understandings of origin and transnational belonging, situating Brazil for example on ‘l’autre rivage’ of the Atlantic to Africa (*Pelourinho*, p. 64). Monénembo manifests this textually with a sense of things being in limbo and marked by tension. Though not dissimilar to that of the dictatorship novels, here this is characterised more by a pull between past, present and future, or forwards, backwards, and sideways movements, than an exertion of pressure from dominant power holders and efforts to evade that. Rather than sidestepping the crafty advances of dictatorship, the inhabitants of these exile spaces seem continually driven towards an elsewhere. In *Attiéké* for example Badio’s repeated refrain, ‘faut qu’on aille au Bar Hélène’, propels the group through the city even as they delay at bars and shops, and waiting for other friends (*Attiéké*, 19, 22, 23, 48). The recurrence of the refrain echoes similar techniques in Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*.³¹ This sense of limbo is present throughout the text as the whole plot is pulled forwards towards Idjatou’s impending flight to Brussels the following day. It suggests a forward projection which hopes to cement their sense of *Heimat*, but concludes in tragedy instead.

The kinds of *débrouillard* subjects and unstable spaces who fill these novels resonate with those we have already seen but are conveyed here in language and forms that are more skilful stylistically than Monénembo’s somewhat dense and content-heavy earliest works. With these texts representations of exile are expressed by multiple voices and languages, a more complex cartography, and the integration of real and fictional memories: these mark a shift in the author’s writing

³¹ Samuel Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1952).

from the focus on historic rewritings and politically engaged priorities of the works addressed in the opening chapters of this thesis.

Language

Écriture fuyante

In reading *Un Rêve utile* the reader's primary experience, at least initially, is one of disarray. Unfortunately, the convoluted nature of the text makes it a frustrating read, and it takes some time to understand the author's purpose. Indeed Geneviève Debeaux complains of the perturbing and unintelligible text, 'je suis toujours dans le brouillard...ce livre échappe à mon entendement!'.³² The text is extremely fragmented, moving between locations and timeframes in dizzying oscillations. Monénembo deliberately sets out to disorient his reader, imposing on them some of the befuddlement felt by exiled newcomers. He largely achieves this by using an *écriture fuyante* and by littering his text with gaps and unknowns, a tendency familiar to other postcolonial authors such as Assia Djebar and Sony Labou Tansi.

The evasive style which defines the novel conveys the chaos of Lyon as experienced by the group of immigrant Guineans. Normal structures of dialogue are absent and Monénembo instead uses endless pages of parataxis, where one speaker switches to the next without the expected signposts of punctuation, and subordinate clauses are rare. The impression is of constant interruptions, and the style is spontaneous: 'Vingt-six ans de metier, aucun grabuge, mais je n'ai jamais compté, s'il fallait tout compter! Tenez: combien de macaques entre Marseille et Dakar?' (*Rêve*, 62). Four characters (Astrid, Galant-Métro, Momo, and Gaby) reappear with their own plots to accompany and cross over the narrator's own trajectory, but countless other names and faces feature as well. Before the reader becomes accustomed to different characters' voices, this is difficult to follow and

³² Geneviève Debeaux, Sewanou Dabla, and Ambroise Teko Agbo, 'Trois opinions sur *Un Rêve utile*', *Notre Librairie*, 126 (1996), 99-100.

hinders understanding: the absence of subordinate clauses makes the reader feel lost. To a certain extent mirroring the gradual getting of bearings those Lyon migrants experience, the reader becomes accustomed to this unfamiliar style and recognises the tone and recurring phrases which belong to the novel's protagonists. But overall, the text is a clash of colliding voices, both internal and external, without clear delineation.

Repetition is a frequent feature of *Rêve*. Monénembo's scenes escape out of sight only to reappear later on. Not only do characters repeat themselves but fragments of the same scene are replayed, added to and yet left largely incomplete. In her thesis, Elisa Diallo has systematically laid out how the numerous plot trajectories are developed, and her table displaying the page numbers of different repeated scenes indicates just how disjointed the story is.³³ In contrast to *Attiéké* which moves quickly forwards through a single day, the frequent circularity of this plot is certainly harder to follow and recurring fragments add to the already disconcerting reading experience.

Defamiliarisation is furthered by multiple gaps and unknowns. Monénembo's writing in *Rêve* is littered with ellipses, but also incomplete phrases and unanswered questions. The author effectively instils a sense of being lost, of not knowing the lie of the land, as the reader struggles to navigate such a seemingly incomplete textual landscape. The narrator is himself never named, and the country he has fled is only ever half named as 'Gui...' (*Rêve*, 205).

This fleeting language, though frustrating, effectively expresses the aimless wandering of new arrivals in Lyon who have lost homes, familiarity, and loved ones on leaving Guinea and must negotiate the French city to establish new ways of being. In *Pelourinho* the moves back and forth between narrators recreate the

³³ Elisa Diallo, 'Moi qui vous parle: Identité et énonciation dans l'écriture de Tierno Monénembo', pp. 76-77.

physical distance between them: they are isolated from one another in a perennial marking of their ruptured maternal-filial bond. The chaos of such *écriture fuyante* is intentionally disconcerting, and effectively demonstrates feelings of fracture and disorientation.

Multilingual texts

In these novels Monénembo expresses the encounter of multiple cultural identities brought about by exile by inflecting his French with other languages. There are elements of other languages present in *Peuls*, *Cinéma* and *L'Aîné*, but here they form a far larger and more integrated part. In *Rêve* unfamiliar terms strike the reader who might first assume they are Africanisms but in fact come from old Lyonnais (*Rêve*, 18, 30). Interestingly, at times Monénembo provides footnotes for these terms (*Rêve*, 40). It seems unlikely that translations provided in such a deliberately disorienting text would be primarily to clarify things for the reader.³⁴ Rather I see Monénembo's glosses as an overt admission of linguistic jarring, a clear signpost to the daily shocks of misunderstanding and the discomfort of that muted state enforced by the incapacity to express oneself. Characters experience discrimination through linguistic alienation, 'ils avaient fait exprès pour que je ne puisse pas traduire en peul' (*Rêve*, 83). These are signs of linguistic exile I mentioned at the head of this chapter.

However, there is at once a celebratory element to this linguistic multiplicity: 'ces personnages ont le génie de faire cohabiter le vieux lyonnais, le français familial, voire populaire, des africanismes pittoresques, pour finalement faire de ce récit un carrefour de langages'.³⁵ Indeed, Monénembo expresses the agile negotiating of

³⁴ Kathryn Batchelor, *Decolonizing Translation: Francophone African novels in English translation* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2009), p. 218.

³⁵ Debeau et al, 'Trois opinions', p. 104.

different linguistic systems that his subjects perform. This is more effectively portrayed in *Pelourinho*, where the novel's clearer structure better hosts the linguistic frictions of Escritore's encounter with Salvador. By the time Monénembo comes to publish *Pelourinho* in 1995, his experimental style, so chaotic in *Rêve*, seems to have found its ideal context. In the melting pot of Salvador, the protagonist Escritore (or Africano, as one of the narrators calls him) brings his West African French into a Lusophone city where the street talk also features Yoruba and English. In this novel, Monénembo provides clearer signposting to the diverse identities represented by such polyphony, as he conforms to more familiar punctuation and structuring techniques. This results in a much more enjoyable reading process, since the identity of the narrator is much more obvious (there are only two narrators, the chapters alternate between them, and their contrasting voices are easy to distinguish). I describe the labyrinthine space of the Brazilian city below, and show further how Monénembo's narrative dexterity has developed to suit this particular story.

Female voices

Another feature of the language in these exile texts is the prominence of the female voice. Where gender is often a salient feature in postcolonial fiction, female narrators are rare amongst work by Monénembo's compatriots. In this way he continues his work of giving a stage to lesser heard voices. *Terroriste* is wholly narrated by Germaine Tergoresse, but alternates between her internal recollections as she settles accounts with her own past, and the stories she relates to Bâ's nephew. In *Pelourinho*, one of the two narrators is Leda, a long term inhabitant of the neighbourhood whose blindness in no way hinders a lucid understanding of the area and those who frequent it. 'Certes la chambre où je vis est emplie de remugles, de cafards et de guêpes, mais c'est un vrai projecteur: je capte tout, moi,

Leda-paupières-de-chouette, toutes les images émises par les vivants et par les morts' (*Pelourinho*, 124). Via both these narrative voices, the author provides a striking insight into the female psyche, and perhaps indicates the central role of his own grandmother in his own life. The tenderness with which Leda talks of her own past and that of Africano is appropriate not only for her age but for the suffering she herself has experienced, which leaves her empathetic and attentive. Her command of embroidery is mirrored in her narratorial capacity, and this pairing is embodied again by Éyenga in *La Tribu des gonzesses*. Just as she creates intricate patterns on cloths which leave customers queuing to buy them, so her storytelling is complexly woven together in great detail, and leaves the reader captivated and drawn in. She winds her way through past and present, shedding light on the complex stories she tells: 'Je suis une drôle de lumière, Gerová, je perçois ton manège et tout le réseau de fils que tissent les araignées sur le rebord de ma fenêtre, les intrigues du présent, la trame d'il y a peu...' (*Pelourinho*, 81).

Germaine is equally enthralling in *Terroriste*, recounting as she does the everyday details of her memories of Bâ, including insights into his many amorous conquests (*Terroriste*, 56). In recollecting her teenage encounters with the protagonist soldier, her attraction and accompanying frustrations are clear (*Terroriste*, 91, 97). Her youth and his isolation place her at a distance that, paired with feminine attention to emotional and personal details, allows for a thorough and quasi omniscient narrative. In this sense, *Terroriste* reads like an echo of Luce Cousturier's *Des inconnus chez moi*.³⁶ This text, first published in 1920, provides a firsthand assessment of the *tirailleurs* in rural France, from the perspective of a sympathetic female voice. In it the same linguistic alienation seen above is centralised as the protagonist teaches French to the *tirailleurs* and thus draws them in to the community initially hostile to them.

³⁶ Luce Cousturier, *Des Inconnus chez moi* (Paris: Harmattan, 2001 [1920]).

The pertinence of dialogic narrative was shown in Chapter Three of the thesis, and I return to its organic nature below discussing community. The dialogue, the story, the narrative becomes the space inhabited as home, the text which welcomes and hosts complex and multilingual subjects (even and perhaps especially in a state of disorientation). In *Pelourinho* the orality of Monénembo's text is accentuated in the alternating narrative structure: Innocencio and Leda respond to each other's chapters, almost completing one another by attending to different details, and in their contrasting tones (the former brash and rude, the latter more tender) form a dual perspective on the dead protagonist. Monénembo, once again, shows that it is only via plural and heterogeneous perspectives and voices that the nuances and ambiguities of a subject can be represented. In *Terroriste*, Germaine's account is told to Bâ's nephew, and similarly to *Peuls*, at times direct second person addresses interrupt her narrative: 'Vous savez maintenant comment ils se sont rencontrés. Je vais essayer de vous dire comment ils ont résisté, et comment les Allemands les ont cueillis' (*Terroriste*, 115). This reminds the reader of the novel's frame, providing explicit guidance that is found nowhere in the earlier *Rêve*. But these interludes also underline the dialogic basis of the text, a vital element of the author's wider depiction of space.

Space

Though Monénembo's representation of space is obviously the central concern for this whole thesis, in the exile texts it is especially marked by oscillations and mobility. The recently published collected volume *At the limits of memory* has ably examined the inscriptions of historic and contemporary experiences (slavery,

genocide, dictatorship) on both the body and on individual sites.³⁷ These localised inscriptions are highly significant, but where Radeslecu's appeal to address the physical and experiential (that which goes beyond the symbolic and metaphorical) draws our attention to corporal and singular marks of suffering, I do not want to stop here. In the aforementioned volume, Françoise Vergès articulates just how dynamic cartographies emerge from 'itineraries of exile, transnational solidarity, the circulation of ideas, and a sense of common interest among people living in different places where they speak different languages and hold different beliefs'.³⁸ This is closer to Monénembo's focus, and he writes loss into the wider text so that the whole of his represented space is characterised by absence and adjustment. It is my view that such an analysis presents a more comprehensive and interesting reading of the effects of exile, and one which is in line with the rest of this thesis.

Against the false idea of two stable worlds separated by fixed boundaries between which migrants live and move in a state of in-betweenness, Monénembo dissolves boundaries and common divisions to challenge our expectations and change our idea of space. The cityscapes expand and contract *according to* the movements and memories of their inhabitants: bits of home are brought in to the here and now which is shaped according to newly invented ways of inhabiting space. Again and again subjects are shown to be shapers of space, leaving space at the mercy of multiple agencies which collide and overlap as they condition their various contexts. Space is not static, fixed, or out of bounds, nor is it a blank canvas or unpossessed no-man's land: it is always the product of active subjects who negotiate and transform it with their ways of being. The trajectories of exiled subjects like Badio and Escritore highlight the usefulness of Certeau's idea of steps taken determining the lie of the land. Their journeys cannot be framed as

³⁷ Nicola Frith and Kate Hodgson, eds. *At the Limits of Memory: Legacies of Slavery in the Francophone World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

movements between two worlds that exist autonomously: the fleeting nature of space in Monénembo's cityscapes, along with their fusion of different people, and the infiltration of past losses via memories, mean that straightforward distinctions between places are dissolved. Nomad subjects carry with them both the losses of exile and the *potentia* to enact creative agency. Tapping into this energy, they can challenge static authority and trace their own inscriptions to define the spaces they inhabit.³⁹ It is this ongoing interaction with space – a kind of borrowing of the hope contained in ideas of *Heimat* – that Monénembo's exile texts display so strikingly.

The cityscapes depicted in *Attiéké* and *Pelourinho* are especially effective in representing ideas of space which are ephemeral, unstable, and fluctuating. The first third of *Attiéké* sees the group of friends transition through different areas of Abidjan in a series of realistic vignettes which accumulate to convey the vibrant, if chaotic, life of the city. Abidjan here recalls the Johannesburg of Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, where different groups move to claim, and expand, their possession of particular areas.⁴⁰ The narrative perspective moves closely with the protagonists, magnifying our view of the city and limiting it to the steps they take. Added to this, the short (day-long) time frame forms a heightened intensity and sense of impending drama. Badio agrees with Tantie Akissi whom he quotes describing the city, 'Bidjan est venue au monde en prématurée, bébé quelconque et non désiré, né aux forceps, fruit des amours de l'eau et de la terre' (*Attiéké*, 39). There is certainly a malaise in the city, a feeling that in all the toing and froing (described above) there is something disjointed. The metaphor of a premature birth recalls the stilted adolescence alluded to in *Cinéma* in reference to Guinea's independence, and the same critique is visible here. It is rife with the friction of social and political adjustments after independence on a large scale, jarred with

³⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Achille Mbembe, and Sarah Nuttall, eds. *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 14.

struggles between tradition and modernity, and the challenges of negotiating violence and poverty in the everyday. The city is a strangely enticing place of contradiction, ‘ville chagrin, ville amour, ville cacao bâtie dans le mirage et l’amertume...le genre d’inconvénient dont on ne peut plus se passer une fois qu’on a goûté aux dures vertus de son excentricité’ (*Attiéké*, 39-40). Monénembo expresses the stuttering disquiet of postcolonial West Africa in the chaos of the urban *rue*: that very detritus Nganang pinpoints as a central feature of the latest period of African literature. He largely emphasises ‘un espace infini de possibilités qui naissent du désordre’,⁴¹ yet his view is not wholly negative and there is creativity and community to be found amidst the mess.

Abidjan is formed out of the very clashes of arrival and departure which take place there, ‘creuset d’ici et d’ailleurs, d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, qui ne trouve son compte qu’aux alentours du point de rupture’ (*Attiéké*, 64). As evident in Jean Rouch’s film set there, the city is founded and continually reformulated on mobility: it is a space which changes constantly, and is impossible to predict.⁴² ‘Bidjan, c’est comme ça: vous demandez l’aumône et on vous donne du boulot, vous attendez la pluie et c’est la mer qui vient’ (146). Similarly, throughout *Rêve*, movement, transition and crossings are referred to by the mention of bridges which trigger the narrator’s memories of his father. Topographical terms abound (53, 80, 92, 189) along with the names of real places in the city (117, 121, 141). All these references to different places accentuate the sense of movement and the primacy of space so characteristic of Monénembo’s writing. But rather than providing stabilising anchor points, this proliferation of place names is disorienting for characters and readers alike, and this is heightened by foreign terms left untranslated (as in *Pelourinho* and *Terroriste*). Lyon, like Abidjan, is defined and conditioned by its inhabitants whose movements inscribe trajectories that run over and around each

⁴¹ Nganang, *Manifeste*, p. 265.

⁴² Jean Rouch, ‘Moi, un noir’ (Icarus Films, 2005).

other in palimpsestic zig zags through the city's *traboules* (*Rêve*, 78). The labyrinthine shortcuts taken by wily inhabitants of Lyon retrace the steps of those used during the Occupation. 'Figure topologique du passage et de la traverse, la traboule permet de jouer au passe-murailles, de disparaître aux yeux des passants ordinaires pour soudainement ressurgir ailleurs.'⁴³ This is the same kind of shrewd, playful occupation of space I examined in *Cinéma*, where Binguel escapes into unseen parts of Mamou, and in *Crapauds* where subjects gather in hidden spaces to evade the power holders' gaze and spreading control. In different times and spaces, nomad subjects shape their worlds in similar ways. The postcolonial cityscape is nothing like the straightforward grids of Manhattan seen from above, to recall Certeau, but is constructed by the secret, meandering steps of those agents who make it their own.

Pelourinho expresses the befuddling experiences of exile in the cityspace with a similar depiction of labyrinthine space. The dizzying effects of wandering lost around the neighbourhood are conveyed in the state of intoxication which hangs over the text. As in *Cinéma*, alcohol is frequently present, and Innocencio's verbose and slurry speech often belie his heavy drinking in unfinished sentences (*Pelourinho*, 143). Urban instability persists, like that described by Abdoumalig Simone as a condition of African cities in the present time, where these conditions 'keep residents in an almost permanent state of changing gears and focus, if not location'.⁴⁴ As in Nganang's framework of detritus, the symptoms of this urban volatility tend to be: the prevalence of alcohol, poverty and violence. These emerge from a combination of related factors, including traits inherited through a fractured genealogy, clashes between different exiled subjects, and the stifling conditions of

⁴³ Mazauric in 'Tierno Monénembo et le roman', ed. De Meyer, p. 128.

⁴⁴ Abdoumalig Simone, 'On the Worlding of African Cities', *African Studies Review*, 44:2 (2001), 15-42, (p. 16).

the urban environment.⁴⁵ In this dual analysis of top-down and sideways influences, I am reminded of Emile Zola's paradigm of social conditioning. Although from far distant time periods and writing contexts, the similarities in these two authors' presentation of city space invite a joint reading. In his monumental *Rougon-Macquart* series of novels, it is persistently to the effects of a *fêlure héritée* and urban *milieux* (saturated by alcohol) that Zola turns his attention. This framing of diachronic and synchronic effects is pertinent because it parallels Noémie Auzas' binary paradigm, in which she reads Monénembo's work as portraying both the vicissitudes of history and the instability of everyday life.

The city space of Monénembo's Salvador is permeated with the smell of alcohol. Mãe Grande's bar carries the stench of cachaça, and the heat of the sun makes walking from place to place an ordeal. Palito, Careca, Passarinho and Preto Velho sit at the bar for hours trying to forget their jobless states, and listening to Innocencio question Escritore (*Pelourinho*, 62). Wide consumption results in characters' swaying from place to place, unsteady on their feet as they wander through the streets of Pelourinho, known for their narrow and winding layout. The uncertainty it brings adds to the precarious and risk-laden nature of wandering around the neighbourhood's dark corners.

As well as the contrasts in narrative voice which keep the text in a state of dialogic flux, and the scarred city's symptoms of insecurity, the overall structure of *Pelourinho* heightens any sense of instability. Rather than being written in a linear-chronological way, 'l'instabilité force et déforme nécessairement le récit', which is full of detours and turns.⁴⁶ Just as the geographical course of the novel is

⁴⁵ See for example, Coupeau's descent into alcoholism *L'Assommoir*, p.322 and Nana's suffocatingly sordid environment *Nana*, p.311. See Auzas, *Monénembo*, especially pp. 1-34. See also Audrey Small's article on *Pelourinho* where she elucidates these multiple influences using the Glissantian terms *filiation* and *étendue*. Audrey Small, 'Roots, rhizomes and l'Africano: traces of Glissant in Tierno Monénembo's *Pelourinho*, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 7:3 (2009), 304-316.

⁴⁶ Auzas, *Monénembo*, p.28.

labyrinthine and narratives twist and turn, so this mobility extends to voice. Leda's confused mental state and multiple stories are conveyed to the reader through unsteady and heterogeneous passages of prose, as Monénembo inflects her narrative with hesitation, repetition, related dialogue and song, creating a winding narrative not easy to follow. Equally, there are sharp changes in narrative pace as threats of conflict and the hunger for money create a consistent forward movement in Innocencio's narrative. Then violent interludes interrupt the narrative flow causing structural rupture in the text; at a basic textual level this results in ellipses, incomplete paragraphs, and broken chapters. Leda's voice generally speaks much more slowly, and her enigmatic account in particular creates hanging suspense through the profusion of ruptures and silences, most notable when she recounts the birth of her son. Her mind wavers from memorised to imagined scenes, leaving sentences unfinished with gaps that stand in for effaced trauma in the shortest passages of the whole novel (*Pelourinho*, 188-193). Loss is inscribed alongside the multiplicity and diversity of Bahia, infused into the novel on linguistic and structural levels with a plurality of characters, voices, styles, stories and colours in such a way that Monénembo's text emerges as a complex labyrinth of stories which 'jaillit par fragments arrachés'.⁴⁷

Linguistically symbolising the rupture and vicissitudes of daily life in unstable space, Monénembo thus conveys the substance of his cityscape in the architecture of his writing. Crescendos in pace, structural fracture, and heterogeneity of narrative perspective and tone are several ways in which the author's writing embodies the instability of Pelourinho, Lyon, and Abidjan. So we see that even in politically uncontested space there is repeated contradiction, uncertainty and

⁴⁷ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 83. Leda's unpredictable orality, which persistently creates a feeling of instability at the linguistic level, would aptly find its place in Glissant's plantation: 'C'est là que le multilinguisme...se fait et se défait de manière tout organique...Le lieu était clos, mais la parole qui en est dérivée reste ouverte.' Glissant, *Poétique*, p. 89.

danger, as alcohol, poverty and violence contribute to a network of unsteady factors. This sense of unsteady terrain is accentuated by frequent extracts of the past that emphasise the tension of moving from what was lost, still partially longing for it, and moving towards an elsewhere that seems ever fleeting. The vocalisation of memory and recollecting brings a sense of temporal oscillation into the spaces depicted in these texts.

Remembering

The instability of language and space comes from moving ever onwards whilst still looking back. This contrapuntal temporality, heightened by a lack of bearings shadowed in memories of the past, is one of the major contradictions of the spaces and subjects of the author's postcolonial settings. So, just as the physical spaces inhabited in these texts are defined by wavering and wandering, so are the subjects. The psychological states of Monénembo's exiled protagonists are as mobile as their physical practices. In *Rêve* they are caught in what the author coins as a state of *tropiconderie*, a kind of out of place homesickness that looks back without wanting to return (76). The losses (of home, people, and past) undergone by travelling characters are announced in every reminiscence, rendering their ways of being in the present always to a certain extent unsteady, since pulled towards an elsewhere that once was. Simply put, where there is loss there is the remembering of what was lost.

These four novels fall into two pairs when it comes to memory: *Rêve* and *Attiéké* are defined by the author's own nostalgia and based on his experiences as an exiled young man in Lyon and Abidjan respectively. *Pelourinho* and *Terroriste* are built conversely on stories the author has researched which fall outside of his personal experience. In this span Monénembo signals in part the value of the autobiography,

which I will revisit in the conclusion, but his proximity to the first two stories is also carried over into the others. The tenderness that comes from autobiographically-inspired content finds its place in the gentleness and attention to personal details voiced by the female narrators of the latter two exile texts.

Largely, though, he foregrounds the value and role of the personal recollection in projects of writing and re-writing history, something we saw at the very beginning of this thesis. The personal memory will always contain contestation (the clashes evident in these exile texts) and omission (signalled by ellipses and incomplete scenes), whereas official historical narratives might ordinarily seek to erase these uncertainties. In placing deaths at the very heart of the two post-mortem narrative memorialisations (*Pelourinho* and *Terroriste*), Monénembo states as overtly as possible that there will always be some silences, uncertainties, and amnesia.

Indeed, we saw in *L'Aîné* how the complexity (trauma, invention, silence) in Faustin's memories indicate the difficulties and nuances of remembering genocide. In *Pelourinho*, the repeated horror story of a tortured slave haunts the text, indelible and yet incomplete (126). And Escritore's lineage project is derided by the other characters: 'tu avais dû délirer une demi-heure ou davantage mais nous ne t'écoutions plus' (150).

The utter naivety of the protagonist's intentions is conveyed by his immature declaration, cited at length by the sceptical Innocencio:

Je suis venu animé d'une vocation: emboîter le pas aux anciens,
rafistoler la mémoire. Je vais faire œuvre de moissonneur: ramasser
les éclats, les bouts de ficelles, les bricoler et imbriquer le tout. Je
veux rabibochoer le présent et l'autrefois, amadouer la mer (150).

Monénembo problematizes, once again, the whole project of retelling history. In Escritore's failed writing project, and the multiple voices which piece his story

back together, there is a pointed show of the futility of historiographical endeavours that are defined by singularity and stasis. Monénembo instead insists upon constant mobility, including that which brings the past to life in the present.

Michael Rothberg's 'multidirectional memory' echoes much of what I outlined in the previous chapter regarding the collective, dialogic production of narratives. He defines memory as 'subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive'.⁴⁸ Monénembo centralises encounters of different voices in different locations, illustrating Rothberg's attention to 'the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance'.⁴⁹ Rothberg highlights the limits of Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire*, in particular its amnesia regarding French colonial history, the impact of decolonization, and postcolonial migrations: all subjects addressed by Monénembo.⁵⁰ Rothberg takes these limits as a starting point for articulating a more comprehensive model for history. His proposed 'noeuds de mémoire' are complicated networks of reference which are always open to renegotiation, shifting the effects they carry for identity and territory.⁵¹ The exile spaces examined in this chapter go some way to embody the textual knottedness Rothberg calls for.

What we have in these four exile texts is spaces so marked by the absences of things lost, that the whispers of memory inhabit them almost constantly. The cityscapes, but also spaces of narrative, acknowledge loss and gaps, and without straightforwardly filling those gaps, in this way make room for memory to be part of the everyday. The complex heterogeneity of these physical and narrative spaces, aptly represented by Monénembo with experimental and dialogic language, in their labyrinthine unravellings recall Rothberg's 'rhizomatic networks of temporality

⁴⁸ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁰ Michael Rothberg, 'Introduction: Between Memory and Memory: From Lieux de mémoire to Noeuds de mémoire', *Yale French Studies*, 118/119 (2010), 3-12 (p. 6).

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 7.

and cultural reference'.⁵² Indeed, subjects' interaction with these knotted spaces requires the kind of active agency visible in Monénembo's nomad subjects. As Rothberg describes, this 'agency entails recognizing and revealing the production of memory as an ongoing process involving inscription and reinscription'.⁵³ So a fundamental part of their conditioning of exiled spaces comes in their enactment of agency in processes of remembering. In this collective process, new notions of home and community are produced, as I come to shortly.

The main road in *Rêve* is described as 'un lit en forme de mémoire' (58), an image which nods both to the layers of stories in the palimpsest of these spaces, but also to the need for an awakening through the agency of narration. The fuzziness of the dream-like sequences of *Rêve* equally conveys the opacity of memory, where names are incomplete, and hypotheses are repeated endlessly like the narrator's incomplete recollections of seeing Hâwa ('elle a pu...', 79-81). Echoing the same image, there is a comfort to the lying low of memory, and resistance to its awakening. In *Attiéké*, the intentional and long period of not mentioning Idjatou's rape builds to an abrupt end as the discussion in the bar builds towards her revelation, 'Puisqu'on parle d'Elgass, s'écrit Habib, parlons-en jusqu'au bout!' (*Attiéké*, 106). There are evidently memories deeply embedded which Idjatou would rather not reawaken, 'Pour moi, c'est comme si vous l'exhumiez, dit Idjatou. Laissons donc tomber tout ça' (123). The contradictions she hears about her brother are uncomfortable and knotty, 'votre culte du souvenir est bien paradoxal' (125). When the truth is eventually stated (about Badio's arranging Idjatou's abortion), it is not long until the tragic denouement of the drama takes place and Idjatou kills herself. It is directly after the group collectively announces those memories that had been put to bed that Badio recalls a former time, before they had all forgotten their principles. And then he describes the abandonment of

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 8.

what was, marking out the departure from Guinea as the tipping point into a whole other way of being: ‘L’exil nous arriva par des chemins de traverse sinueux et hostiles comme une embûche conçue par une rivale jalouse’ (139). It is that rupture and all the associated losses that mark these exiled subjects, and then lie in layers of memories, picked up collectively at various moments in meandering narratives.

With each of these texts: personally in the cases of *Rêve* and *Attiéké* and historically for *Pelourinho* and *Terroriste*, a long time passes before memories are articulated. Some amount of forgetting, of pain, rupture, and loss, it seems, has to occur before narratives can be formed around what was lost, and as with the cases of the genocide in Rwanda and the Thiaroye massacre major anniversaries can trigger particular acts of remembrance.

To end this examination of Monénembo’s exile texts I will outline how, in similar fashion to the rest of the texts I have addressed, the author moves his subjects out of the limits of victimhood. Whilst in no way denying the pain and suffering they experience, he recasts them in new frames of subjectivity that concentrate instead on the creative agency that forms new communities and stories, in turn reformulating home (as people and place) as a nomadic *lieu pratiqué*. Radulescu highlights how this creative agency works in situations of exile:

Memory has to double its capacity, so to speak, for it has to perform the regular function that memory does, and in addition, to hold and keep alive the information and experience of one’s most important and formative experiences from childhood to the time of the exile, without the incentive of the physical reality. The memory of the exile has to feed on itself to some extent, to keep creating and re-creating itself in order to replace that which has been lost in the physical realm. This

double function of memory, however, is partly the **source of creativity** and of an **enhanced grip on reality**.⁵⁴

These are the two elements I will rest on in addressing the responses of nomad subjects to end this chapter.

Subjects respond

The ambivalence of exile is astutely represented by Monénembo in a portrayal of exiled subjects who, alongside the suffering of loss and the struggle of negotiating the instabilities of everyday life, produce new communities and stories. In *Creativity in Exile*, Michael Hanne et al elaborate on other positive aspects of exile, including the cross-fertilisation of cultures, enhanced empathy, and dynamic interaction with others.⁵⁵ The title *Un Rêve utile* aptly captures this dual strength of pragmatism and imagination: characteristic of Monénembo's nomad subjects. Familiar by now, those elements of creativity, ingenuity, readiness, and ruse are central to how subjects respond to being in these spaces of exile.

Heightened consciousness

For Monénembo, 'l'exil est un apprentissage et un lieu de transformation extraordinaire', and he is not alone in noting the 'heightened state of awareness' which it can produce.⁵⁶ Numerous passages in these texts are self-consciously narrated, whether that is in second person dialogue with the homodiegetic addressee like Bâ's nephew in *Terroriste*, or as internalised monologue like Badio's reflections towards the end of *Attiéké*. Monénembo has his protagonists pause in self-reflection, in order to prompt the reader into noting this heightened state of awareness, brought about by exile and the distancing that entails. Further, these moments accumulate to form the kind of vision of postcolonial subjectivity

⁵⁴ Radulescu, p. 189 (my emphasis).

⁵⁵ Michael Hanne, ed. *Creativity in Exile* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2004).

⁵⁶ Éloïse Brézault, *Afrique: paroles d'écrivains* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encier, 2012), p. 266; Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, *V. Y. Mudimbe: Undisciplined Africanism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013) p. 48.

Monénembo seeks to establish across his work: subjects as agents who negotiate space on the basis of well-informed and knowledgeable minds as opposed to having things happen to them.

In Chapter One I showed how this knowledge was collected from a slightly removed position of observation, as Olivier de Sanderval first noted in his *Carnet* then adopted the Peul practices he witnessed. In Chapter Two it was from the hidden places in the wings of the stage of power politics that the dominated closely watched the overt and covert practices of the dominant in *Crapauds* and *Écailles* then established their own in response. In the last chapter Binguel and Faustin's position as marginalised characters in the in-between stage of adolescence allowed them the distance required for coping, mocking, and finding their own way. The same distance enables irony on the part of narrators who bring cutting humour to their stories in *Peuls*, *Rêve* and *Attiéké*. In his re-writing projects, Monénembo proves that the passing of time can come to stand as a distance which is rendered positive. By this I mean that after so many years, there is a certain detachment which creates clarity and also the capacity to view things with a certain amount of irony. As an author, he is removed enough (temporally and spatially) to observe, formulate knowledge as his characters do, and produce critical and creative narratives. There is striking lucidity behind acerbic critique. He inscribes this process in the texts, as when the narrator of *Rêve* cynically recalls the pro-Independence pursuits of his father's generation:

Ils ont dit: Indépendance! Et le marché est devenue un marché de dupes, un champ miné: sous chaque motte de terre, un coup fourré; sous chaque vœu pieux, une astuce; sous chaque désir, un projet; sous chaque intention, un plan; et sous chaque slogan un chiffre... Mais, essence volatile et perfide, le lyrisme s'est exhalé, il est resté l'éti-

peau de la chimère comme une épingle corrodée sous la grosse roue
de l'Histoire (*Rêve*, 227).

It is clear from this passage how the indictments of the dictatorship texts were formulated previously in these personal recollections of the author's earliest exiles.

In *Attiéké*, Badio describes his home country with disparaging pessimism, 'c'est un vieux rafiot en feu d'où chacun s'échappe selon les moyens de sa peur' (47), and is unwaveringly pragmatic in his description of Abidjan, 'vie imprévisible, roulette russe et chasse à l'appeau' (51). Germaine's concluding passage recounting Bâ's imprisonment and execution is typical of the clarity with which she recounts his story. The facts are recounted briefly, but not without tenderness and poetic detail. 'Le 3 décembre 1943, Addi Bâ et Marcel Arbuger furent condamnés à mort. Ils furent exécutés le 18, un matin si brumeux, selon Henri Maubert, que l'on pouvait voir les ailes des anges frôler les clochers d'Épinal' (*Terroriste*, 224).

In the other chapters the separations or marginalisation of characters happen on a local scale. But in these exile texts, subjects experience displacement transnationally, and a vast geographical distancing along with social and linguistic alienation. The experience of learning, or accumulating knowledge from this removed position, is the same, but enhanced by the clashes with alterity which are exaggerated by greater distance. These are typified in the chaotic cityscapes Monénembo depicts, 'une foule s'agglutine en un demi-cercle où se trouvent tous les teints de peau humaine, tous les styles de coiffures et de redingotes' (*Pelourinho*, 82). And these are also most clearly displayed in the most recent of Monénembo's fictional contexts, (the exile texts are all set in the last forty five years), since 'the dynamics of decolonization, transnational capital, and globalized media in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have accelerated the flow of the materials of memory across borders of all kinds and multiplied the possibilities of

encountering alterity'.⁵⁷ For Rothberg, such multiplicity fosters productions of memory that are collective and dynamic, and which activate 'multidirectional flows of influence and articulation'.⁵⁸ The polyphony and generic diversity which characterise Monénembo's work are evidence of such flows.

In Chapter Two this heightened state of awareness (including self-awareness) led to a readiness for resistance. In *Rêve* there are traces of political engagement but the *débrouillard* response that is more interesting for the contexts of exile comes in formulating community and home afresh. The ongoing dislocations to which mobile characters are subjected lead to an almost permanent awareness of location. The ambivalence of exile finds further body in this, since such a state of consciousness acknowledges both the absences of what has been lost and the potential for what could be produced from new encounters between subjects and spaces. This is where the pragmatic and innovative elements of nomadic thought meet in productive enactment of *potentia*.

Creative source

Writing on the urban exile space, Mazauroic concludes that 'la ville où l'on se perd, dans l'apparente folie de ses métamorphoses, reste le seul espace où il est encore permis d'inventer quelque chose, où un présent désordonné accule à l'invention'.⁵⁹

Significantly, it is not that the fact of exile necessarily leads to creativity. It is dependent on being re-located in a place that fosters creativity *and then* enacting agency to produce something. In Monénembo's exile texts the main productions are stories and newly configured communities.

Of course the enhanced grip on reality does not result in straightforward stories, and the murkiness of memory complicates the narrative process. As Leda describes, 'les souvenirs et les rêves, le présent et l'autrefois sont de vrais fils

⁵⁷ Rothberg, 'Introduction', p. 9.

⁵⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memories*, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Mazauroic, in 'Tierno Monénembo et le roman', ed. De Meyer, p. 119.

dévidés...qui tissent une trame étonnante afin de me divertir' (*Pelourinho*, 127-8).

The *écriture fuyante* examined above in *Rêve* equally indicates the rupture and opacity which are at the heart of exile narratives. Yet the subjects' creativity in storytelling is evident.

As in his other texts, Monénembo sets apart a central storytelling figure in the text. The Serer narrator of *Peuls* is replaced by the more sympathetic Germaine in *Terroriste*. As is the case with Leda in *Pelourinho*, it is around these characters that all the action revolves, and their dedication to narrating provokes the forward movements of the texts. The wily street wanderers Binguel and Ardo of *Cinéma* find their counterparts in Badio (*Attiéké*) and the unnamed narrator of *Rêve*.

Stories

This latter text is narrated as a series of daydreams, and is so expressed as to resemble a great sigh. It is a creative catharsis with voices unwinding and letting off steam as they speak of exile and its angst.⁶⁰ Often the remarks are addressed to the city, named Loug after the Latin Lugdunum, as a kind of affectionate conversation with the place itself. 'Qui sait, elle est peut-être déjà là, Loug, errant dans ton labyrinthe à la recherche de son homme' (79). In spite of, or perhaps provoked by, the gaps and absences in their lives, the exiled youngsters pass time by telling stories. Some mock their former home, 'cette Ifrikya plaintive et mourante de solitude et d'apathie' (130), others make fun of fellow passengers on the bus (131). The stories act as a kind of digestion of information and expression of feeling: the disorientation is channelled creatively as the narrator recounts the meanderings he witnesses and is part of. Just as Monénembo works the French

⁶⁰ Virginie Brinker, 'Vagabondages et déroutes', *La Plume Francophone* 15/10/2007 <<http://la-plume-francophone.com/2007/10/15/tierno-monenembo-un-reve-utile/>> [accessed 13 August 2015].

language around the contours of Lyonnais, so the characters adjust to their new location and negotiate its challenges.

With their tongues loosened by booze, Innocencio and the nameless narrator of *Rêve* sit in Preto Velho and Astrid's bars to tell their stories. 'Je laisse rarement filer une heure sans revenir m'y morfondre à l'ombre de ton souvenir' (*Pelourinho*, 12), says the former to his dead protagonist addressee. Echoing the words of his ancestor, old Ndondo, the narrator repeats that amidst the noise and confusion of everyday life and the unstoppable passing of time, 'il faut toujours que la parole vienne accentuer les faits' (*Rêve*, 105). Out of the haziness of their drunkenness, and in order perhaps to decipher some meaning among the chaotic fluctuations of exiled life, come their words. It seems the creative acts of narration bring structure and purpose as they articulate the losses of exile and constitute some of its gains.

Community

Innocencio, like Leda his co-narrator, lives at the margins of his social world. His sense of isolation initially leaves him lost, 'je marchais sous l'effet du vertige...je ne me sentais plus le même' (*Pelourinho*, 20), but then leads him to form new connections, namely with the protagonist to whom he posthumously addresses his narrative. The acceptance and affection offered him by Escritore changes him, renders him more patient and caring. The sadness then of losing this new companion leaves him grief-stricken. Once again Monénembo inscribes loss into the everyday, as Innocencio remembers: 'je sens la faille, plus large qu'une vallée, naître du tréfonds de mon âme et engloutir ma raison' (*Pelourinho*, 24). This is but one example of the circularity of losses and gains that add to the instability of exiled space, within which Monénembo shows exiled subjects reconfiguring 'home'.

The ambivalence of exile is fleshed out further and loss and gain emerge alongside one another in terms of community and belonging. Where friends and family are lost in the various dislocations written through these four novels, space is created for new connections and relationships. Rothberg posits ‘new forms of solidarity’ as one way remembering can have a positive effect on the present, and lists among the shared experiences ‘savvy and creative resistance to hegemonic demands’: *débrouillardise* in action.⁶¹ It does not come at the expense of acknowledging loss, but there is certainly a hopeful nod to the opportunity for new encounters and the re-memberings they can host.

Addi Bâ’s increasing sense of belonging with the people of Romaincourt (the fictionalised name for Tollaincourt) comes in contrast to the descriptions of frozen isolation he suffers in the ‘air glacial et tranchant’ (*Terroriste*, 43). In a parallel to Leda’s embroidery and related images from *Pelourinho*, Bâ is welcomed in by Germaine’s mother when they sit doing embroidery together. A friendship is constituted, right as their exchange of stories accompanies their crossing threads. She pioneers in caring for him, ‘tentait comme elle pouvait de server de racines et d’ombrage à cet Africain que personne n’avait prévu et qui, à un continent d’ici, n’avait ni frère ni sœur, ni héritage ni mère’ (*Terroriste*, 99-100). Emphasised by the affectionate tone of Germaine’s narrative, the respect felt by the community for Bâ who went on (with Arbuger) to lead the local resistance, is increasingly evident. It is in their shared fight against occupation that these characters come together, similar to dominated characters who gathered in *Paradis* before escaping in *Crapauds*. The collective re-writing which places Bâ at the centre of the Romaincourt community is recounted towards the end of the novel.

Cet homme ne fut pas un fantôme de passage, aperçu en train de
slalomer entre les arbres, à califourchon sur une vieille bécane, figé

⁶¹ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, pp. 4; 23.

dans son uniforme de tirailleur. C'est à Romaincourt qu'il a vraiment vécu, c'est pour Romaincourt qu'il est mort. Il fait partie de la mémoire d'ici, il est la mémoire d'ici: le premier homme à donner son nom à une rue de ce village (*Terroriste*, 173).

The sense of belonging as well as honour given him is strong. He is inscribed on the geography, shared memory, and essence of the place. As well as another example of the rewriting of history of marginalised figures, this text denies anonymity and instead celebrates the forming of renewed communities than can happen after exile.

And Badio and his friends' pragmatic approach to life extends to their sense of social belonging. Faced with marginalisation in the rest of Abidjan, they form a new home together with tantie Akissi (whose bar is host for the majority of the novel's action).

Qu'importe le jour ou le mois, nous avons toujours eu le sentiment d'être ici chez nous. Le seul coin de la ville où nous ayons l'impression de compter vraiment. Au début, nous n'étions que des clients parmi d'autres. Nos liens avec tantie se sont tissés comme un nid de tourterelle, en toute patience et minutie. Pour être honnête, le mérite lui en revient. Nous autres n'aurons apporté que la niche de notre présence, quelques promesses et les échéances interminables de nos petites dettes. C'est ainsi que les semaines nous ont faits amis et les années presque mère et fils (*Attiéké*, 66-7).

That feeling of significance, of counting, is born of relationships which come to be like family. There is an acceptance of one another, and mutual support largely expressed in the shared dialogues of these novels. And yet, to return to where I began this chapter, both these texts centralise separation, such that the communities

formed post-exile also experience rupture and dislocation. The last pages of both *Terroriste* and *Attiéké* recount the deaths of their central characters. Bâ is executed by German soldiers and Idjatou kills herself with the knife Akissi has been asking to have back for most of the story. A similar sense of (fractured) community and belonging is found amidst the inhabitants of Lyon and Salvador in the other two exile texts.

The innovative practices of the nomad subjects render them in Monénembo's texts more than survivors. Their (sometimes shady) ways of negotiating the everyday condition the spaces they inhabit, whether that is Bâ fathering illegitimate children in the Vosges (*Terroriste*, 80), or Badio et al skipping bus fares in Abidjan (*Attiéké*, 62). These wily ways of being lead to new senses of belonging to space, and belonging with other people. Sélom Gbanou describes the upheaval that the author represents in his texts: 'Mais l'enracinement dans un nouvel espace est-il possible, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit d'un enfant dont l'existence est soumise à de telles vicissitudes? Voilà bien la question que pose, inlassablement, l'écriture de Tierno Monénembo.'⁶² Monénembo answers his own question, by inscribing his unstable text spaces with characters who adopt common ways of being that are sensitive to movement, unpredictable circumstances, and the losses of home, people, and pasts. Home looks very different to what it was formerly, but rootlessness does not equate to not belonging. Expectations of what belonging and home mean shift in the experience of exile, and a less tangible form of *Heimat* often comes to replace fixed locations. Indeed, for nomad subjects, there is always belonging, even if they are not in the same physical location, they belong to a shared mindset or imaginary, what Seydou describes as 'une communauté par l'esprit'.⁶³ This is central to Monénembo's recasting of African subjects: in spite of the isolating ruptures of

⁶² Gbanou, Sélom, 'Tierno Monénembo: La lettre et l'exil', *Tangence*, 71 (2003), 41-61 (p. 55).

⁶³ Seydou, Christiane, 'Epopée et identité: exemples africains', *Journal des africanistes*, 58 :1 (1988), 7-22, (p. 18).

exiles, his subjects do not remain alone. New communities are formed around shared experiences of the everyday, and a common set of responses to the instability of space. African subjects are represented not as victims but as space-defining agents characterised by readiness and mobility.

The exiled community is multilingual, full of fracture, mutual strength and solace for the losses experienced. Living in it requires *débrouillardise*, the ‘ruse de perdrix, méfiance de caméléon’ needed since the demands of these urban spaces mean these communities are not soft or forgiving (*Attiéké*, 30). But there is belonging for those who can negotiate the vacillations with humour and loyalty.

As Rothberg suggests in his introduction to the *Yale Studies* issue on multidirectional memory, these kinds of comings together provoke and foster endless numbers of new avenues of reading and writing memory. The melting pot cityscapes in these exile texts fictionally represent the kinds of exciting transnational collaborations which that volume collected, and point to the creativity inherent in scholarship that works to account for the multiple forms and nuances of remembrance in globalised spaces.

The paired pragmatism and imagination inherent in the title of *Un Rêve utile* point to a richer life – again, not in a naively celebratory way, but in that certain things would not feature had exile not happened. Heightened awareness, newly formed communities and senses of belonging all emerge from a response to exile that is led by innovative and practical thought.

Conclusion

Across these four novels different forms of exile are present. Echoes of the mass historical exiles of the slave trade and world wars are the background to more recent exiles, some enforced politically and others opted for (like Escritore’s ethno-tourism in search of family history). None of these can be removed from their

economic, political or geographical contexts, and, though fictionalised by Monénembo, retain nonetheless those elements that ground them in reality. In line with his portrayal of nomadic ways of being right across his publications, here too characters' ongoing practices are grounded in the challenges and opportunities of real, problematic situations. Both the initial exiles and the exilic existences that proceed from them are simultaneously grounded and mobile; that is, although they are ever on the move, these nomad subjects are always still constrained or limited in certain ways.

That is to say, as I outlined at the beginning of this chapter, these subjects suffer. Their storytelling is not the privilege of elite travellers: I must clearly state the distinction that these subjects are not romanticised free-to-fly intellectuals but subjects who have been expelled, propelled or displaced in some way. They are characterised by readiness and imagination and are capable of political resistance but also community-building, linguistic innovation and narrative creativity. What they share is common experience of displacement, not a shared privilege, which feeds into their common nomadic imaginary and is partially manifest by the products of enacted *potentia*.

‘Je suis un écrivain de l’exil, mon œuvre est née en exil et je suis entièrement un produit de l’exil.’⁶⁴

Monénembo remarks on the creative posture which exile enabled him to adopt, so it is certainly productive. But it is not wholly *positive*. Nor is it an abstract experience, since there are no abstract exiles, just as there are no abstract nomads.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Brézault, p. 266.

⁶⁵ See also Homi Bhabha “Migrants, refugees, and nomads don’t merely circulate. They need to settle, claim asylum or nationality, demand housing and education, assert their economic and cultural rights, and come to be legally represented within legal jurisdictions.” “Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium,” *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), p. 347. Thus Deleuzian concepts of absolute rootlessness strike us as abstract and unhelpful. Each exile is re-rooted; perhaps we need to rethink concepts of ‘home’ and ‘settled’ so that we do not disqualify experiences of both which are less permanent than the majority. All

Rather, each narrative of exile (including the author's) is grounded in real place(s) and real time(s), and these are both contrapuntal. Equally, there are always power structures at play; exiles are not outside of these, even if, like in *Rêve*, they might be classified as 'sans papiers'. So even Said's proposed role for academics modelling themselves on travellers (who are dependent 'not on power but on motion') is thus flawed as it is impossible to remove travellers, exiles, and academics from systems of power. Kettler proves this with his example of Kahler's visit to an Ohio university. This example runs counter to Said's 'potent, even enriching motif of modern culture' precisely because it demonstrates that exiled academics do not dwell in some separate 'exile space', but rather have to settle and connect in a new place, relate to a new set of people, according to a new set of norms and expectations.⁶⁶ Power and legitimacy always come into play alongside locality. This is the case for any subject exiled geographically, socially, or linguistically. And this is the difference between presuming exiles dwell in a 'no man's land' (devoid of power structures and outside of time) and claiming they work out and shape their space as a temporally and socially specific 'nomads' land'.

Grounded in real spaces, as we have seen, subjects experience a transformation of perspective when dislocated geographically. Monénembo inscribes the perspective shift via narrators' use of irony as they observe what goes on around them. Their vision of place, including a former place of belonging, and people, undergoes a change, and this change is ambivalent. Combined with regret and sadness at the loss of a former place, there is perhaps both heightened appreciation of that former home, along with a more critical view furnished by the distance. In the

nomads must settle somewhere for some time. This is vital in establishing the middle ground between ethnography and the abstract theories of Deleuze and Guattari, and should be emphasised. I am not positing a completely home-less existence of perpetual movement, rather a particular way of inhabiting space which arises from being less fixed, being nomadic.

⁶⁶ Kettler, p. 272; p. 404.

imaginations of exiled narrators, places undergo transformations as they are experienced in relation to former/current other places, be they the labyrinthine streets of urban centres or the small unfamiliar village. Positive relationships with hostile spaces can be established via wily subjects turning them to their advantage, like Bâ forming the maquis in the depths of Vosges countryside.

Exiled subjects are also grounded in time, as we have seen. There is a necessary double-working as subjects have to exercise memory twice over, not being in the place where they are recalling and thus not having the usual physical triggers and aids. Leda in *Pelourinho* is a prime example of a mind meandering from past to present and back again. Exile, though in many ways causing a rupture from what is past, does not equal forgetting the past. Rather, memory features more prominently in spaces of exile and thus forms a temporality that is always a mixture of past and present, as subjects look back to what was whilst negotiating the everyday present.

Rather than being about living in a placeless and timeless way therefore, exile is more about possessing a *débrouillard* familiarity with dealing with distance and rupture, and an energy which comes from continual movement channelled into creative production. Certeau posits the immigrant as the exemplary figure used to 'the abandonment of our familiar points of reference...the acquisition of new ways of thinking and acting. The immigrant has already faced this test of imposed change, of obligatory displacement, and has faced it successfully'.⁶⁷ There is nothing complacent about this posture, since it is characterised by a sharp awareness of struggle, coupled with a (necessary) readiness to move. Exiles engender new ways of relating to space: without the expectation of a rooted home, but with the capacity for making a way and a new community for oneself wherever.

⁶⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and other Political Writings*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 133.

This chapter, like the preceding ones, has shown Monénembo's attention to nomad subjects as wily *débrouillards* who negotiate spaces in spite of (and exploiting) their instabilities and challenges. In writing about exiled subjects, I have emphasised once again that these existences are neither metaphorical nor abstract, but grounded in real situations full of challenge. As in the rest of this thesis, I have looked beyond the individual body at a common imaginary and its relation to physical space. In these four exile texts, Monénembo highlights suffering, isolation, and displacement, and the effects of their connected losses. In his use of *écriture fuyante*, precarious space, and centralisation of fragmented memories, the author represents the context and experience of various kinds and degrees of exile. Exile is one vector in the range of nomadic experiences, and helpfully highlights that subjects are neither timeless nor placeless, but continually relocated. Out of all of these displacements, innovative and creative subjects produce new stories and, in part via these, new senses of community and belonging. In the conclusion I assess how Monénembo's own trajectory as an exiled subject, Peul, and nomad has influenced and been inscribed in the fictional texts examined through the thesis.

CONCLUSION: Monénembo

Monénembo's conviction regarding his purpose is clear: 'Je vous assure qu'on ne vit pas pour être heureux, on vit pour témoigner'.¹ This drive to bear witness and to tell stories has propelled the author along nearly four decades of publishing. And though, as I have shown, major historical events feature in his writing, largely Monénembo follows the steps of unsung heroes of the everyday, weaving into their stories aspects of his own. As things stand, 'l'Afrique n'intéresse le monde que quand elle est folklorique ou scandaleuse'.² And the author aims to redirect the focus of global readers. In all this he shows African subjects as empowered agents, rather than limited to being victims of imperial conquest, dictatorship, and so forth. By spanning such vast geographical and historical space, he draws out the commonalities in subjects located in vastly different contexts. The nomadic thought which typifies his characters across the board is, arguably, based on his own experiences. This autobiographical foundation will be my focus in this conclusion. Building on the observations I made in the last chapter, I will highlight how Monénembo's real experiences of language, space, and remembering emerge across his oeuvre.

In Chapter One I outlined the critique (by Pels et al) levelled at nomadic thought for being too abstract and removed from reality. In her excellent *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan argues in a similar vein about the drawbacks of theories of nomadism. When theorists neglect to acknowledge the effect of their personal situation, including privilege, their understanding of nomadism is inadequately fleshed out. For her the biggest problem is that the critic's positionality vis-à-vis the production of margins and centres is rarely or insufficiently addressed.³ But in

¹ Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, 'Une parole francophone: Tierno Monénembo' [accessed 09/09/15].

² Ibid.

³ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 90.

postcolonial texts autobiography is often an integral part, not least in the work of Monénembo, and cannot be neglected. Rosi Braidotti is one example of a critic who inscribes herself (and announces such self-inscription) right through her bio-theoretical work. The conclusion of her *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* reads as much as an autobiographical account as an outline of her theory, so connected are the two, and culminates in an ode to the relative who inspired much of her philosophical journey.⁴ Instances of intertextuality see Monénembo's biography frequently inhabit his texts. As in references to Brazil in *Rêve* (215) and the nostalgia in *Attieké* (56-7).

It is precisely the overlap of real and fictional, the way Monénembo weaves his story into the stories he invents, that exempts him from the aforementioned accusations. There is nothing abstract or metaphorical about the basis of his texts. In their various forms they embody the vicissitudes and tensions of both his life and other real life situations he depicts. The inclusion of the autobiographical thus not only informs Monénembo's writing but grounds it well away from lofty and abstract conceptions of nomadism.

In the last chapter I examined language, space, and remembering in representations of exile. Monénembo's real life trajectories between and around several countries place exile and relocation at the centre of his experience. Escaping from Guinea to Senegal, studying in the Ivory Coast, then teaching in Algeria and Morocco, later visiting Brazil and Cuba, and living in Caen, Normandy, for many years, his texts are littered with influences from each of these sojourns. In *Cinéma* the escapades of Binguel in Mamou are closely shaped by the author's own childhood there. His memories of Abidjan in *Écailles* recall not only a place but a particular time and community, marked by fretful relocation and youthful angst. And what emerge as

⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 359-365.

disappointingly similar depictions of Salvador (Brazil) and Havana (in *Pelourinho* and *Coqs*) indicate the brevity of Monénembo's visits there compared to his relative longevity in other places.

Now that Monénembo has returned to live in his native country it will be interesting to read whether his future depictions of Guinea exhibit a shift in perspective and priority. Future studies will need to address whether the author makes a shift to depict any more tangible sense of *Heimat* in place of dislocation. Drawing on post-genocide writing's engagement with trauma studies could prove helpful in depictions of Guinea following the outbreak of Ebola. Now repatriated, his earlier commitment to critiquing Guinean politics may feature again in forthcoming publications. Based on recent trends, this is more likely to be in journalistic writing and media appearances than in his fiction:

On sait que ça doit servir à quelque chose obligatoirement mais on sait en même temps qu'il faut vraiment s'y accrocher parce que ce n'est pas du tout évident. On écrit toujours en vain, la littérature n'a jamais servi de leçons, dans le monde entier.⁵

Though somewhat disillusioned, his persistent compulsion to write and his commitment to the duty of memory suggest he is conscious of the great purpose he senses in writing, too.

Having lived in so many places, and created communities in multiple locations, Monénembo's sees the world as small, local, full of connections. His literary oeuvre displays the affection and affinity he feels towards a range of places. The nomadic mindset is primed for openness to new community-formation, as well as suspicious and wily. His commitment to a transnational community of African subjects explains his absence from the *littérature-monde* manifesto and places him

⁵ Éloïse Brezault, *Afrique: paroles d'écrivains* (Montreal: Mémoire d'encrier, 2012), p. 267.

more appropriately in Nganang's manifesto of African literature, and further comparative study with different language African authors would establish a firmer sense of this collective. Yet his vision of community is no naïve idea of all-transcending human affinity. His cynicism is evident:

Comme pour confirmer ce que tout le monde savait déjà: pour être élu en Afrique, pas besoin de mouiller la chemise. Avec un peu de chance et quelques copains bien placés à l'ONU, à la Maison Blanche, à l'Elysée ou au Quai d'Orsay, vous êtes sûr de passer même à 18 %.⁶

His overt avowal of problems, conflict, and violence means no depiction of community is free from critique. His role as writer, as he has said, is to bear witness, and to do so in order to challenge and critique.

On what has influenced his writing, he says, 'we shouldn't speak of influence, but of confluence and preference, in the plural',⁷ so it is important to nod to the multiplicity of influences (personal, political, geographical, cultural, linguistic,) which emerge in the variable landscape of his texts. The central themes of his work (language, mobility, and space) undoubtedly stem from his own experiences of travelling, and that continual process of renegotiating one's relationship to different spaces. From Monénembo's own words, his sense of identity revolves around a number of ambiguous elements, each of which plays a significant role in his fictional texts. Taken together, Peul, orphan, exile, and nomad subject, form a kind of frame for viewing the contemporary African subject. Though these are evidently not the only components of Monénembo's identity, since these arrest much of his attention in fiction, it is worth drawing out the parallels between that and his autobiography.

⁶ 'L'ONU recolonise l'Afrique', *Le Monde*, 3 January 2011.

⁷ Nicholas Elliott, trans. 'Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A with Author Tierno Monénembo'.

Monénembo extends and explores his identity as each of Peul, orphan, exile, and nomad subject through the characters and stories he creates. In each there are traces of his autobiography, and in each both criticism and creativity which work together to challenge understandings of history and subjecthood.

Monénembo as Peul: rewriting history

In response to the question, « Qu'est-ce qu'il y a de peul dans votre écriture? »,

Monénembo replies:

Je ne sais pas vraiment. Je sais qu'on naît toujours quelque part et qu'on naît au monde avec un héritage conscient ou inconscient, que la part peule de ma culture, de mon éducation, je sais qu'elle est énorme, qu'elle est immense mais je ne sais pas la mesurer. Est-ce que ma part peule, est-ce que ma part musulmane, est-ce que ma part française sont égales ou il y a une différence? Je n'en sais rien. Mais je sais que je suis Peul, je suis né dans une atmosphère culturelle peule et évidemment, tout ce que j'écris s'en ressent (Cadet)

His whole literary work is run through with references to Peul ways of being, not only as manifest in different characters but in allusion to cultural practice, particular traditions and so forth. His Muslim and French 'parts', which overlap with these, also remain to be explored. Monénembo's personal heritage provides rich sources for a first person account of Peul mythology and beliefs, thanks both to his proximity to these in his early life, and the elucidating effect of distance later on as he was repeatedly relocated and viewed them in the light of others. He spent his childhood in Mamou, in the heart of the Fouta-Djallon (predominantly inhabited by Peul people) and in *Cinéma* describes a daily existence which varies

widely from the urban lifestyles he later adopts in different countries. In line with his comments about not measuring the degree to which his writing is 'Peul', I see this as an inextricable part of what he brings to the page when he writes. Being Peul, he cannot write other than as Peul.

But more than this, the author is committed to reframing Peuls in a new light. In his bid to re-write their history he sets to counter narratives which are discriminatory and exclusory. In this way Monénembo's commitment to *reprendre* engages with ongoing inventions of Africa. He writes after an ethnographically focussed corpus of writing on Peuls, and brings through fictionalised accounts a more dynamic pair of narratives. In his focus on the metamorphoses of individual subjects, the versatility of oral language, and the importance of mobility, Monénembo renders the content of *Peuls* and *Roi* strikingly present. In these personalised reworkings of historiography he brings to life those who have previously been marginalised or neglected. In addition, Monénembo's media presence continues to break silence over the unequal representation in the political spheres of West Africa today: 'La situation paraît d'autant inquiétante qu'il plane sur la région un 'non-dit' tribal lourd de menaces pour l'avenir: tout sauf un Dioula au pouvoir à Abidjan; tout sauf un Peul au pouvoir à Conakry'.⁸

His commitment to re-writing stories of the misrepresented or underacknowledged is not limited to Peuls. Both Addi Bâ and Olivier de Sanderval are celebrated for the same wily *débrouillardise* ironically berated in *Peuls*. The naming of those neglected in national historiographies is central to his postcolonial project, and the parallel between these two figures is clear. But this pairing also indicates that Monénembo is not Afrocentric in his focus. Though the majority of his subjects belong to an African Francophone diaspora, the focus is not on their common

⁸ 'L'ONU recolonise l'Afrique'.

origins or on any desired return to a revered past. Instead Monénembo highlights their connections to, for instance, other heroes of the French resistance, or other imperial explorers, signalling the author's concern for forgotten heroes more widely. This positions his work in dialogue with Bouchareb's *Indigènes* and Luce Cousturier's *Des Inconnus chez moi*, as well as Sembène's 'Le camp de Thiaroye' and Armelle Mabon's research and advocacy.⁹ Monénembo seeks to *reprandre* these stories, and celebrate their everyday heroes. 'La résistance, ce fut des gens comme vous et moi, des fermiers, des bouilleurs de cru, des braconniers, des instituteurs, des gargotiers, des médecins, des lingères' (*Le Terroriste noir*, 125).

Monénembo's criticism is pointed at the all too often belated recognition of people's worth. 'Les héros ne le sont qu'une fois qu'ils sont morts, n'est-ce pas ?' (*Le Terroriste noir*, 104). In a disappointingly similar echo of the basis of *Pelourinho*, in *Les Coqs cubains chantent à minuit* the addressee and central character, El Palenque, only draws interest once he has departed. The narrative consists of Ignacio addressing him in his absence, almost as if the memory of him warrants more interest than his presence. In these two posthumous memorialisations, as in the historical re-writings, Monénembo draws attention to the tendency to give value to people only after they have died, and at the same time critiques such a practice by celebrating the importance of those characters' everyday lives. His critique extends to global inattention to Guinea and other sub-Saharan African nations. In recent media appearances he has been outspoken about Africa being forgotten by the rest of the world, until something tragic happens. Indeed this is partly the basis of his contribution to the Fest-Africa project where he is unique in foregrounding the survival of an orphaned adolescent; the other contributors centre their texts on the events of the genocide. Monénembo's stance is that Rwandans deserve attention not only for their suffering, but for their

⁹ See Bibliography.

survival. Equally, his home nation has been left to suffer ‘fifty years of hell’, largely forgotten by the wider world since independence. ‘La Guinée se meurt, le monde a le droit de savoir, le monde a le devoir de s’indigner. Les Guinéens méritent la compassion des autres nations.’¹⁰

His critique more generally is of the dangers of marginalising people and their histories. By choosing to write on Peuls, *tirailleurs*, and Guinea as a nation, Monénembo draws attention to the violent and irreversible consequences of neglect in historiography and contemporary narratives. In the shadows of amnesia, ethnic groups are repressed, heroes not given their due, and countries abandoned to brutal regimes. Though not a focus of this thesis, Islam as another group identity appears in his work *en filigrane*, and would provide another interesting focal point for an analysis of rewriting in comparative sub-Saharan literature. Although not resurrecting any outdated or naïve notions of humanism, the author is explicit and unashamed in his appeal to shared humanity, the departure from which he derides. ‘Je veux que le sang versé le 28 septembre en Guinée fasse pleurer dans les chaumières de France et de Navarre, de Sibérie et d’Alaska, de Taïwan et de Zanzibar! C’est mon droit de terrestre, c’est mon devoir de vivant, c’est ma foi d’être humain (oh, je sais que dans notre monde postmoderne et ultra-civilisé, il est presque devenu indécent de prononcer ce mot-là)!’.¹¹ Attention should not only be reserved for when disasters happen. He seeks to draw the focus of a global readership, in order that they might take interest and invest in Guinea (and other under-acknowledged subjects) including but not only when tragedies occur. In line with the nomadic practice he also scribes in his texts, the author is at once critical and creative: for Monénembo, Guinean politics, ethnic discrimination,

¹⁰ ‘La Guinée, cinquante ans d’indépendance et d’enfer’, *Le Monde*, 4 October 2009. Ignorance and indifference on the part of international leaders only makes things worse. For instance according to Monénembo, the blame for the crescendo of violence in the Ivory Coast in 2011 lies with the United Nations: ‘La faute à qui? Au monde entier et d’abord et avant tout à cette fameuse communauté internationale qui n’est jamais mieux dans son rôle que quand elle rallume les incendies qu’elle est censée éteindre’.

¹¹ Ibid.

historiographical amnesia present persistent problems that do not get enough air time. He critiques these more and less overtly (in his journalistic and fictional writing respectively) but also seeks to change things via creative textual representations that challenge former narratives and put Guinea, Peuls, *tirailleurs*, and other forgotten heroes on the map.

In his focus on orphaned figures he highlights the effects of such loss on individuals, informed in this too by his own experiences. Like the self-writing Mbembe describes, Monénembo's partly biographical depictions are self-consciously critical. Difficulty, guilt and loss are at the heart of his reframing of contemporary African subjects.

Monénembo as orphan: writing loss

To represent the ambiguity and liminality of identity, Monénembo often chooses young protagonists to carry his stories. In *L'Ainé* and *Cinéma*, these are adolescent boys, and in *Rêve*, *Écailles*, and *Attiéké*, young people in their twenties. Their temporal in-betweenness and obvious stages of transformation add to the geographical mobility which already defines them as becoming-subjects. As I explored in Chapter Three, Mbembe underlines that ambiguity and guilt must be addressed in new African modes of self-writing; and it is by concentrating on loss that Monénembo achieves this.¹² As well as the loss of innocence and childhood common to everybody, the protagonists in each of these five texts to a greater or lesser extent lose the protection and influence of parents.

The cross over with Monénembo's own experiences is easy to see. In Chapter Four I mentioned how the social and geographical details of *Un Rêve utile* recall the author's stay in Lyon. The behaviour of the group of students is as meandering as the text is linguistically: long, convoluted sentences reflect the moral disorientation

¹² Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p. 260.

of young people dislocated from tradition and family. This recalls Monénembo's nostalgic tale of adolescence in *Cinéma*, where truant Binguel learns how to make his way in life from shoemaker Ardo, rather than adhering to the rules of his disciplinarian parent figures. Monénembo's own story of separation from his parents, brought up by his grandmother following their divorce, then subsequently distanced from his homeland as a student and professional, has echoes in the stories he writes. A kind of exile, when forced to grow up far from his parents, is marked by his opting for the penname Tierno Monénembo rather than his birth name, Thierno Saïdo Diallo. The loss of familiarity and anchor, far from home and newly independent, is bound to have led to disorientation for the author similar to that of the characters he invents. Without parents, he developed an autonomous *débrouillardise* whilst forming new senses of belonging and home which were characterised by transience and pragmatism.

But more than this, the author's inclusion of orphans is a through road for discussing two other important issues: first, the role of women in Monénembo's life; and secondly, Guinea's separation from France at independence in 1958.

The prominence of female storytellers in Monénembo's later work is striking. In *Pelourinho*, Leda's voice carries the most introspective and mesmerising half of the story. In *Tribu*, the cacophony of female voices conveys disharmony at the same time as mutual affection among the group of immigrant women. And in *Terroriste*, Germaine's affection for Addi Bâ colours the account of him with warmth. This affirmation of power indicates Monénembo's respect for the female voice: 'toutes les femmes dans mes livres se cherchent un rôle et finissent par en trouver'.¹³

¹³ 'Une parole francophone'.

Monénembo accredits his grandmother's stories with great influence on his writing: '[she] never wrote a thing, by the way, but [her] tales and legends were my first heritage'.¹⁴ In *Cinéma*, arguably the closest of Monénembo's texts to autobiography, two mother figures exist in parallel. Mère-Griefs, whom until later in the novel is referred to as Binguel's mother, is tyrannical in her insistence on good behaviour. She is perennially dissatisfied with his performance at school and his lack of help around the house, and becomes hysterical at his every provocation. Néné Goré, older and frailer, only has gentle words for Binguel, who cares for her with patience and sympathy. The polar contrasts of the two women show the ambiguity of the role of mother, and have wider symbolic significance in the context of Guinea's development.

As I discussed in Chapter Three on *Cinéma*, Binguel's adolescence can be read as an allegory of Guinea's accelerated political coming of age following the vote to become an independent state in 1958. The pattern of young people separated from parents in Monénembo's work brings an added element to this allegory, underlining the loss, trauma, and disorientation of losing a mother, or motherland, experienced through the abrupt and unforeseeable rupture of France withdrawing support from its former colony. The leitmotifs of both adolescent and orphan therefore bear significance autobiographically for the home nation as well as for the author.

In 1958 when the people of Guinea voted in a referendum against the constitution proposed by de Gaulle, they rejected membership of his French Community and opted instead for immediate independence. What followed was a sharp rupture from France, who sought to isolate Guinea diplomatically, economically, and

¹⁴ 'Amazon exclusive'.

militarily.¹⁵ The withdrawal of nearly all assistance left Guinea abruptly to survive its new status, and Guinean leaders had to juggle numerous urgent priorities whilst adjusting to the challenges of a newly independent state.¹⁶

The pressure on Guinea (particularly for national unity rather than regional or ethnic divisions) was enormous. Without precedent amongst France's colonies, Guinea was thrust somewhat blindly into independence, and subsequently turned to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc for help.¹⁷ A struggle for stability often dominated over welfare and economic development, and inherited political and administrative systems jarred with the realities of a post-independence state.

For though the scission was sharp, French involvement in Guinea arguably dissipated over an unhelpfully long time. For Robert Spencer it is precisely the institutional legacy left by colonial powers that caused the greatest problem:

they left far too slowly and reluctantly and in most cases they did not really leave at all. Instead, those powers constrained their former colonies' independence with a legacy of authoritarian institutions, with the destruction and prevention of democratic movements, and with continued relations of subordination in the economic sphere.¹⁸

Newly independent leaders were left to work within inherited frameworks but without the roots behind them, and still indirectly under the control of the French. Where structures remained from the colonial era, liberal democratic constitutional

¹⁵ Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 157.

¹⁶ 'They had to consolidate nation-states out of arbitrarily defined colonies; they had to blend together nationalist parties (ideology, organisation and personnel) and a colonial state apparatus in a hastily re-christened democracy; and, finally, they had to spur economic development, that is utilise the country's resources to create wealth-producing assets...The simultaneous attempt to realise these three ambitions militated sharply against the preservation of democratic rule' (Chabal, p. 5).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

¹⁸ Spencer, Robert, 'Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o and the African dictator novel', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 47:2 (2012), 145-158 (p. 150).

rule did not, and it depended on resources to which new rulers did not have access.¹⁹ The ambiguity of the relationship between former coloniser and former colonised led to stilted development and unclear expectations, as recreated in the economic chaos of Mamou (*Cinéma*, p. 183).

The parallel with Monénembo's orphan motif is obvious. Faustin and his fellow orphans are trapped by violence in Kigali: they are driven by addiction to drugs and alcohol, and their HQ is host to fighting and bravado, and of course the fatal shooting that lands Faustin in jail. Just as the responsibility and dangers of being alone do not match its projected advantages, so the lure of independence proves disappointing. Disillusionment leaves a bitter taste in the mouth, aptly conveyed by Faustin's caustic tone and bruised nonchalance. 'Le destin se montre toujours farceur dans les romans de Tierno Monénembo, *Cinéma* n'en est pas une exception - le rêve est toujours au rendez-vous en même temps que le bruit et la fureur des rues africaines'.²⁰ Representing post-independence Guinea, the crumbling reality of frayed politics, corruption and accelerated development portrayed in *la rue* and *detritus* outlined by Nganang is evident in Monénembo's novels. It is thus that Monénembo paints a picture of his native land, as '*l'aîné des orphelins*' among France's ex-colonies, fending for itself in unstable circumstances.

Of course such losses and separations lead to the creation of new communities and senses of belonging, as I showed in the last chapter. Against a backdrop of uncertainty and violence, the author commends the survival and resilience of characters who make their own way in spite of such volatility. How to cut it alone becomes how to form horizontal links with fellow *débrouillards*, thus Binguel's turning to others for street-wisdom and practical skills could be a development of

¹⁹ Chabal, p. 32.

²⁰ Abdourahman Ali Waberi, 'Destin farceur', *Le Monde diplomatique*.

Monénembo's allegory of Guinean independence, with Ardo as a representative of Nkrumah's Ghana.

These explorations into France and the wider Francophone world reveal the significance of distance in an increasingly globalised world. In Chapter Three I examined the effects on perspective, writing, and subjectivity in Monénembo's representations of exile, and here I turn to his own experiences.

Monénembo as exile: writing distance

In the four texts I labelled as Monénembo's exile texts, the author underlines the hardship that follows displacement, and how various kinds of loss reverberate in subjects and their stories. By depicting memories and narratives that are fragmented through unstable and ever-changing spaces, he portrays the responses that prove necessary in exile. Monénembo's *écriture fuyante* shows subjects as repeatedly relocated and forming new communities and homes in the process.

The voluntary journeys of *Pelourinho* and *Coqs* present a different kind of writing distance, where geographical remoteness enables a proximity to personal history. With *Escritore* and *El Palenque* Monénembo intimates how exile can be productive both in terms of personal discovery and narrative creation.

*L'exil, c'est aussi une école, un apprentissage, c'est un lieu de transformation extraordinaire, c'est un lieu de fiction. C'est là qu'on rencontre énormément de choses différentes de soi, c'est là qu'on finit par se découvrir tout en découvrant les autres.*²¹

Both protagonists excavate secrets from their pasts and provoke recollections that bring together numerous other characters as they tell them.

²¹ Brezault, p. 266.

As Said argues, it is important when discussing the creative potential of exile not to obscure what is truly horrendous:

that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography.²²

Monénembo is consistent in representing the unbearable consequences of exile, as well as the violence and danger that causes it and goes on making it merciless. His own close to the bone experiences of exile enable him to write these with compassion, accuracy, and authority. The recurring motifs are indicative of the weight of exile borne in his life and his resemblance with certain figures is difficult to ignore. To name but one example, the adoption of Samba (in *Écailles*) and Addi (in *Terroriste*) by an older woman after they are found lying, almost dead, in undergrowth, must be an extension of his own experience, growing up under the care of his grandmother.

Yet the author is neither writing a 'poetry of exile', nor a purely autobiographical account of his exile. The act of writing is a large part of his life story; indeed his initial writing was provoked by political exile. '*The writer I became was revealed by the pain of exile rather than the magic of precocious talent found in Mozart or Rimbaud.*'²³ Not only the displacement, but the very losses which exile brings about, create gaps to reveal creativity. In the spaces left by lost homes, familiarity, and former identities, there is room for the production of new stories, and new ways of being. For Monénembo the highly poetic and enigmatic nature of *Rêve* reflects the ambiguous, disorienting experiences of exile whilst evidencing the

²² Said, p.174.

²³ 'Amazon exclusive'.

creativity which can stem from it. The emergence of languages other than French in several of his texts is a linguistic ‘signifier’ of the richness which develops from such meanderings. Grounding in real experience of exile comes alongside a creative drive for aesthetic originality.

Gbanou describes exile as an ongoing process:

Il est toujours un lieu de relance de l’errance et, en bout de ligne, le personnage vit un exil « multispatial » qui ne connaît jamais de terme : il est partout l’étranger, il est toujours celui qui est en train de faire sa valise.²⁴

Though in Monénembo’s case it has been a long series of relocations, I would not agree that the writer is a stranger everywhere. A strong sense of community prevails in many of his texts, but particularly in those that recount his earliest exiles in *Écailles* and *Rêve*. The coming together of friends through collective storytelling features increasingly in his corpus, and indeed signals the author’s own belonging in a community of fellow storytellers. His early years in and recent return to Guinea stand him alongside fellow Guinean authors such as Fantouré and Sassine, but his various exiles and journeys have also positioned him in wider writing communities that include French, North American, Latin American authors.²⁵ Those include other writers and politically vocal public figures such as Wole Soyinka and Mahmood Mamdani. Forming such communities is one of the productive acts of *débrouillardise* Monénembo has lived and relived, settling, for however long, on the common ground shared with other nomad subjects and writers.

²⁴ Sélom Gbanou, ‘Tierno Monénembo: La lettre et l’exil’, *Tangence*, 71 (2003), 41-61 (p. 57).

²⁵ In an interview with Éloïse Brezault, Monénembo mentions Rabelais, Céline, Faulkner, Joyce, Garcia Marquez, and Vargas Llosa, among others (Brezault, p. 274).

Monénembo, according to Gbanou, progressively resorts to writing as a ‘lieu spirituel où il invente une parole qui le rapproche davantage de son point d’ancrage géographique et culturel’.²⁶ For the author, a sense of internal exile through remembering is of central importance to his writing:

*C’est un lieu extraordinaire, très fécond pour la mémoire... Les réminiscences, tout ce qui s’est passé avant, toutes les odeurs dont on ne se souvenait plus... Tous les petits détails de la vie passée reviennent en force. Je pense que la plupart de mes livres sont bâtis là-dessus, sur une espèce de vie antérieure qui constitue l’obsession permanente des personnages et qui est le lieu central du livre.*²⁷

In response to any enforced displacement – be it geographical or otherwise – a self-imposed exile which emerges as politically-charged, creative and expressive, is the continuing recourse to writing.²⁸

Tierno Monénembo habite son écriture comme un no man’s land, intermédiaire entre deux espaces dans lesquels, confusément, il se cherche une vie conforme à ses aspirations profondes. C’est pourquoi l’écriture s’inscrit dans une liturgie qui intègre l’ici (l’asile) à l’ailleurs (la patrie).²⁹

The limited nature of this analysis simplifies what we know to be a complex geographical trajectory. I suggest pluralising ‘les ici’ and ‘les ailleurs’, considering the number of refuges and countries between which the novelist has moved. Further, though the tension and trauma suggested by Gbanou’s ‘no man’s land’ analogy are appropriate, I take issue with its negative connotations of vacuum and

²⁶ Gbanou, p. 59.

²⁷ Brezault, p. 266.

²⁸ Said cites Steiner who refers to writers as ‘unhoused wanderers’. Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and other literary and cultural essays* (London: Granta, 2000), p. 173.

²⁹ Gbanou, p. 60.

stasis. I posit rather that Monénembo's spaces of writing are a nomads' land, inhabited by subjects who, responding to precarious and changing circumstances, enact creative agency producing narratives and spaces for themselves.

Monénembo as nomad subject: writing movement

In his dexterity with time, genre, and style, Monénembo is a nomad writer. The shifts he lives leave him well placed (and re-placed) to question boundaries, histories, and difference. Rather than exploiting his position of privilege as a writer to perpetuate marginalising discourses (which is Kaplan's primary critique of postmodern nomadic philosophy), he foregrounds under-acknowledged figures and reveals them as *débrouillard* agents who shape the spaces they are in. Where Kaplan critiques those theorists who erase or neglect boundaries, history, and difference, Monénembo's depiction of volatile and violent spaces recognise these again and again. And by overlapping and moving between autobiography and fiction he further sustains this sense of instability.

The versatility in the development of Monénembo's writing engenders more 'movement'. In his first novels *Crapauds* and *Écailles*, his priority is to critique Guinea. He then moves on to scribe his autobiographical experiences in a number of exile texts which deal primarily with loss, rupture, and reconfiguring notions of community and home.

With *Rêve* there is significant stylistic shift in the creative use of language and this marks a move beyond the urgent insistence on indictment of corruption. More recent comments by the author suggest a certain amount of disillusion. He sees it as at once futile and necessary to write in a politically engaged way. Nonetheless, the author has become increasingly vocal in journalistic contexts. And in place of the international political action he critiques, it is nomadic ways of being that he

proposes: '*Pourquoi le défi et la menace du canon là où la discrétion, la ruse, la prudence et le tact bref, l'art de la diplomatie, auraient suffi?*'³⁰

Subsequently his commitment shifts to a wider project of developing and enriching inventions or broader narratives of African history (Thiaroye fits with *Peuls* and *Roi* in this theme), space, and subjects by re-writing old stories and by moving certain figures from the margins to the centre. The diversion from an *écriture engagée* within his fiction gives way to a new energy for creative writing where Monénembo's aim is redirected to representations of subjects and space which are more complex, comprehensive and creative. This is going back further than political corruption or malpractice, in order to challenge misconceptions and superficial readings of subjects and space on which discriminatory enactments of power are often based. By challenging the very formation of ideas Monénembo aims to recast African subjects as *débrouillard* nomadic subjects who shape the spaces they inhabit, despite those spaces being disorienting and hostile. His latest texts centre on collective processes of remembering where characters are gathered together by the stories they tell. Loss is a catalyst for this, as with *Les Coqs cubains chantent à minuit*, his latest novel. Nomadic thought looks towards this kind of creativity: contextualised in the here and now, drawing on present resources. In its familiarity with perpetual relocation, there is an openness to learning that Monénembo celebrates in his characters. He identifies with the protagonist of *Le Roi de Kahel*: 'Olivier de Sanderval himself! I like his intelligence, his splendid sense of pride and solitude, his insatiable curiosity, his courage at the edge of despair, his perpetual dissatisfaction, and his obsessive desire to be unlike anyone of his time'.³¹ By illustrating mindsets which are open to adapting and learning, Monénembo reframes the contemporary African subject in

³⁰ 'L'ONU recolonise l'Afrique'.

³¹ 'Amazon exclusive'.

these features, and defines it as innovative and *débrouillard*. His hope is that more widespread narratives of victimhood and suffering will henceforth take into account the agency and creative power of these subjects.

Monénembo, the Peul, orphan, exile, and nomad subject, recasts African subjects in a way that represents the ambiguity that he himself lives. In this he does not seek to present an image of innocent or wholly positive African subjects. Indeed, he holds them up as (varyingly) complicit, guilty, and dishonest. He does not posit an idealised humanism, but a representation of human subjects irremediably affected by the material situations they experience. It is impossible to see things otherwise after certain tragedies in particular: ‘justement, le génocide, c’est le chaos de la conscience humaine, le cimetière de l’humanisme’.³² Monénembo elucidates the common ground and positive creativity that can emerge in spite of this. Amidst the chaos of volatility and disaster, his grounded subjects respond with wily and compassionate *débrouillardise*. In focussing on subjects in space, Monénembo creates a nomads’ landscape across his oeuvre, where an Afrocentric retracing of origins gives way to a synchronic and transnational examination of ways of being. That is, a celebration of displaced characters creating their own spaces and stories in the unpredictable circumstances in which they are relocated: an essential move forward in the postcolonial recasting of contemporary African subjects.

³² ‘Une parole francophone’.

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